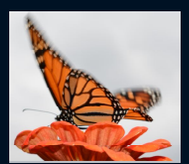
FICTION?

Through THE Eidetic Plane

& Old Photos of the Author's Relatives

Plus: Hazel Madding's Ordinary Magic

Chaotic Terrain Press



JTB 7 & 8

A Case from Paranormal Investigator Jonathan Barron

Through THE Eidetic Plane

Mickey Hunt

eidos

Noun: Something that is seen or intuited: idea, form, essence, species. An appearance, conception, or form of intuition. The cognitive part of cultural structure made up of the criteria of credibility, the logic used in thinking and acting, and the basic ideas by which the members of a culture organize and interpret experience. Logical structure, contrasted with ethos.

eidetic memory

Commonly called photographic memory, it is a rare ability by which a person remembers by observing images embedded, or seen in his mind—an ability to recall images with vivid, detailed accuracy, usually by holding a mental snapshot after the original stimulus is gone.

romance

Noun: A story imbued with a quality or feeling of mystery, excitement, and remoteness from everyday life.

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& Old Photos of the Author's Relatives

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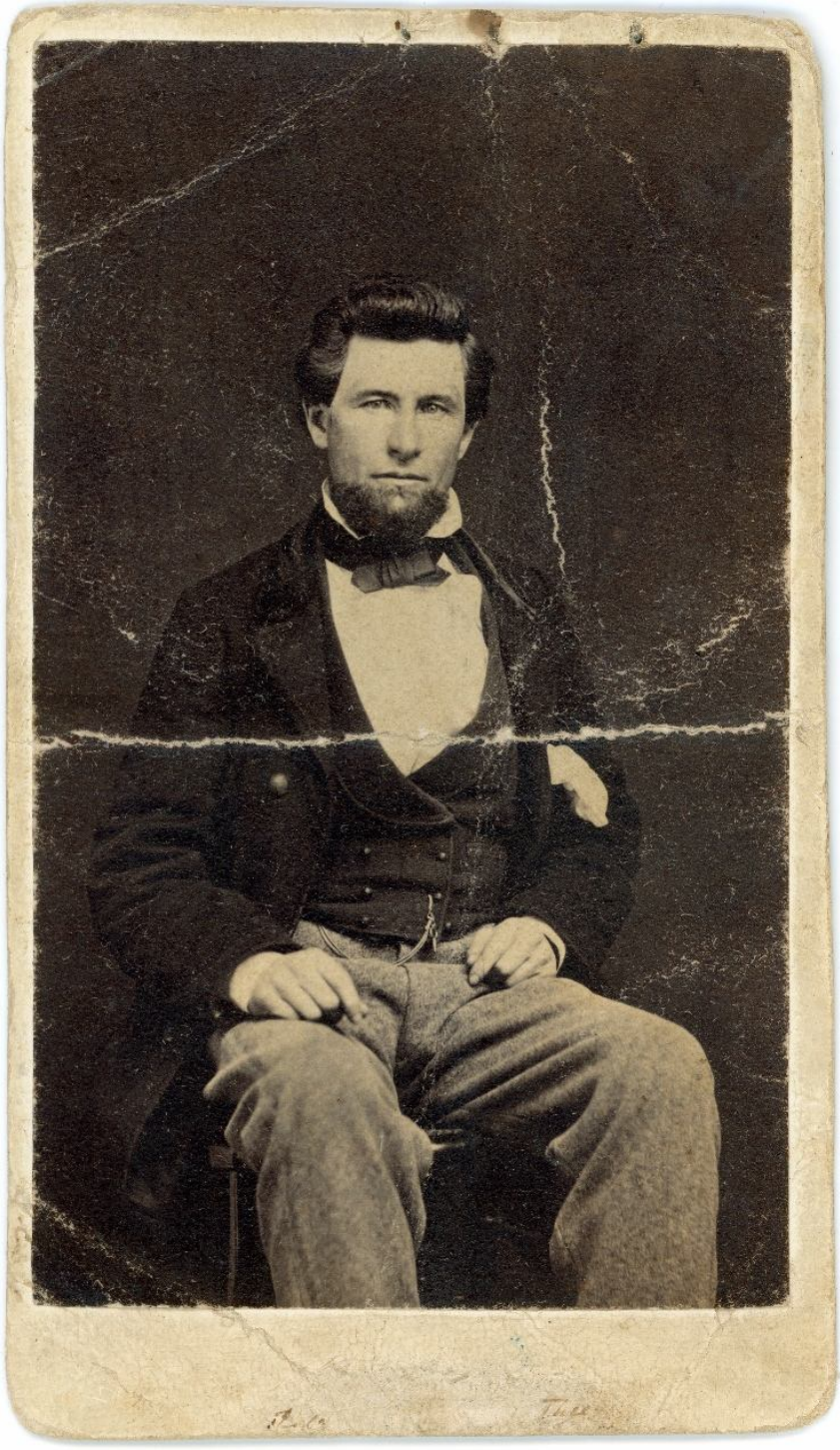

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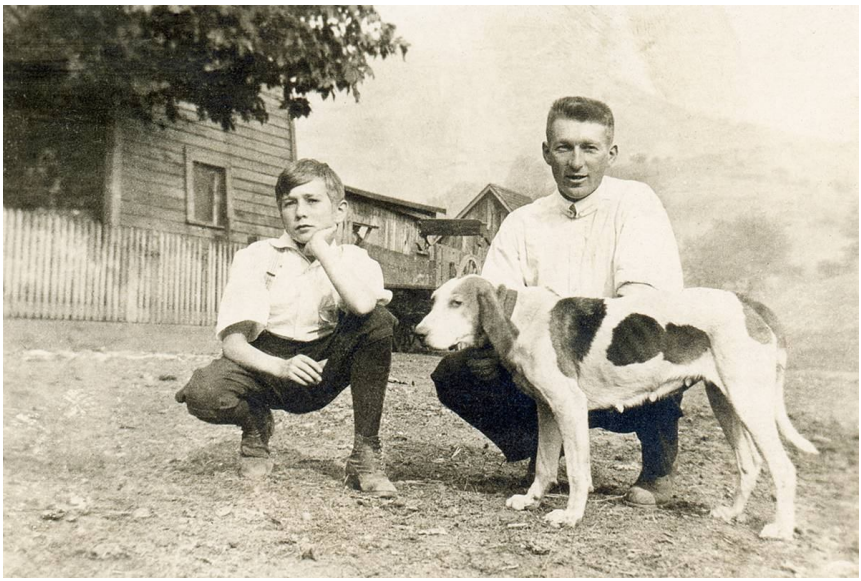


In memory

of them all

Through the Eidetic Plane

Publisher's Advisory: This story is inspired by real events, meaning the author stole shamelessly, changed everything around, and lied through his teeth. Don't trust a thing you read in this story.

Friday, May 8, Afternoon
Isobel Barron's Initial Visit to the Museum

"If you don't like it, we'll release you from your contract."

At saying this, the president of the Yoncalla Museum and History Center, Danford Beale, winked at me, caught the eye of the woman sitting on a bench at the far end of our lobby, grimaced, and marched out through the squeaky front entrance door.

Suspended between contradictory ginger-headed impulses of melting into helpless tears and angrily chasing Beale down and screaming, "I quit!" I could only close my eyes and silently pray with each breath, "Jesus help me." When I opened them, the woman from the bench was standing up and watching me with a soft, sympathetic expression on her face.

When she saw I had calmed down and opened my eyes, she approached. "I'm Isobel Barron, from the LHMF; I have an appointment with Melinda Waldo."

"That's me."

Since she had already witnessed the emotional scene, there was no use pretending it hadn't happened. I hoped she hadn't seen Beale give me the lascivious wink. I leaned my head back in taking a deep breath, then said in exasperation, "Of course. You're here to see my brilliant improvements and programs as a model for the hundreds of local history museums around the country."

We skipped shaking hands.

"Yes, but for now, I'm more interested in hearing what all the yelling was about."

"You heard that? *I* wasn't yelling."

She smiled and said, “I know. Yes. Your lovely transom window is open.” She gestured to my office door. “And the door isn’t soundproof. But I didn’t catch the subject matter.”

“Okay. I need to talk with somebody about this, so it might as well be you.”

“I’ve already toured the museum, and I found your formal sitting room appealing. Can we talk there?”

“Why not?” I asked rhetorically. “We close in a few minutes, so nobody will see us bending the rules.”

I made sure the visitors had gone, said goodbye to Alice, my assistant director, and to Sidney, our elderly volunteer handyman/groundskeeper/security guard. I locked the doors, put water on for tea, and spread blankets over the comfy chairs that had been right here in the historical house in the center of town when the museum acquired it by donation years ago. The museum committee had no money in those days, so the house sat boarded up until 2012, when Danford Beale moved into town from California and took an interest.

“My maternal grandmother was a hoarder,” I began, as we settled into our chairs. “Among her ‘collections’ were hundreds of family photographs, many of them from central Oregon and going back generations, as far back as when photography took hold in America, say, from the 1850s. And then before photography, there were letters and journals. Those photographs and other documents, boxes of them, fell to my older brother, and then he also became a history magnet, with others sending him their family photos and papers.

“In the last years of his life—he died young—my brother became obsessed with preservation, with creating our legacy. I don’t mean that in a bad way, because this was important work, as our family tied in with the early settlers and pioneers of Oregon. With his background in art, he was the perfect archivist, electronically scanning those photos and organizing them.

“When Danford Beale first arrived in Yoncalla and began working with the museum committee, my brother loaned us the main body of the pertinent material. Also, he had compiled volumes of his own analysis, identifying people and connecting them to known historical figures and established narratives. I had

helped him when I was a teenager. It was pretty impressive. At least all my professors were impressed."

"Your study was history, correct?" Mrs. Barron asked. "The westward expansion?"

"Focusing on American history from Lewis and Clark to Theodore Roosevelt. My Master's thesis sought to explore the involvement of the western territories in the American Civil War, particularly how this impacted the native peoples."

"Wow. That sounds more like PhD-level work."

"Yeah," I said, laughing. "It was. I guess my brother and I have that attention to detail in common. I used mostly first-hand sources, too. I never completed my PhD, however."

"So, the argument…"

"Of course; sorry, got distracted. One fascinating bit of information my brother stumbled upon was a murder committed in Yoncalla, Oregon in 1865. He had all the newspaper clippings.

"So, an ancestor of mine back then, George Coe Duniway, was convicted of the murder and robbery and was hanged." I leaned down to point out a window. "Right over there in the town square, which, as you may have seen, forms a natural amphitheater. The whole event was highly controversial at the time because a third of the town, kin to the victim, hated Duniway, or at least believed justice had been served by the hanging; a third of the town thought he was innocent; and the last third held him up as a beloved folk hero who defied the law, destroyed a monster, and was martyred for his heroism.

"That story had been lost until my brother brought it to the fore. Danford Beale saw an opportunity and created a festival in honor of my ancestor. He called it the Duniway Festival. That festival has been held every year now for more than a dozen years, and it became the sustaining force in the museum's success, if not the whole town itself."

"I see. So, you don't like the festival celebrating your ancestor's ignominious end? But you took the job anyway."

"Nearly a year ago. At first, I thought the festival was cool. It was highly sensationalized, but it got people interested in history, and it brought in visitors from all over the state. It was a boon for local businesses. It also became a vehicle to promote

Beale's landscape construction company and allowed him to buy ostentatious, expensive cars."

"What happened to change your mind?"

I held my breath, anticipating Mrs. Barron's skepticism. After Beale—and that did not go well—she was to be only the second person I had told this to.

"The problem is," I said, "the festival is based on lies. On historical lies and untruth. My ancestor was neither a murderer nor a hero. He was innocent of the murder and robbery, and I can prove it with photographs. I just found them a few days ago. He was in Portland at the time of the crimes, 150 miles away."

A long pause followed my revelation. Mrs. Barron was looking down, probably thinking I was crazy. But her sincere curiosity took me back a little.

"Your ancestor was hanged?"

"The city erected a monument commemorating the event."

"How long ago was this? The hanging."

"161 years."

"So, the wrong can't be made right for people involved."

"No. But the history should be corrected."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

"A dozen history museums around the country that would love to hire you, and not only small museums."

"I love my job, but what's more important is that I've built a community here. My boyfriend's family lives here—we're getting married in November. He's a contractor and built us a new home—almost finished—on several acres. My great-grandparents are buried a few miles away. I grew up in Northern California, but this is my home now. This house—the museum—once belonged to my maternal grandfather's brother."

"Hmm. Sounds hard. Before I leave today—I have about an hour before I have to rejoin my family—may I see your proof that your ancestor is innocent of the murder?"

"Your family is with you?"

"Our 2-year-old daughter is with my husband today. Our son is at sailing camp."

"Sailing camp! Sounds fun."

"This trip is sort of a vacation for us, though my husband works remotely."

"What does he do?"

"Umm. He's an investigator of sorts. He does a weekly radio program."

"Maybe he'd be interested in my case. If I had experts on my side…"

"Your story is interesting for sure, but he's into… situations that are more… I'll say, more exotic."

"What could be more exotic than celebrating a historical convicted and publicly executed folk-hero murderer who was proven innocent? Did you know they reenact the hanging?"

"What? That's bizarre. You'd think—"

"People, including Danford Beale, call the week the Done Away Festival."

"Named after your ancestor."

"I don't mean Duniway, but Done Away."

"Oh. It's like Fall River, Mass, celebrating Lizzie Borden, who was acquitted for the axe murders of her father and stepmother, but history still suspects her."

"You know about that? She even has a museum. Dramas and a Broadway musical about the murder. They put on a poetry reading contest."

"Our foundation awarded a grant for the Borden Museum's literary journal, *The Hatchet*. You'll understand later, maybe, that my husband's cases *are* far more 'exotic,' but I'll ask him. He has a pretty big following. The publicity—"

"Publicity? That's what I don't want. I won't only be released from my contract, I'll be fired, and I haven't made up my mind what to do. I only want the festival to be cancelled for good, keep my job, and not move away."

"Let's see your proof. Start with the court documents."

"Then, follow me."

I took her outside and under the covered walkway into the annex building that houses all of our records, those not currently on display.

"This building was funded by your foundation long before I was hired."

"I know. It was one of our first projects, and before I was involved, too. Climate-controlled and the whole package."

I switched on the lights and rolled the enormous shelves by hand to open up the aisle we needed. I went straight to the correct records box and took it to a research bench where I already had the boxes containing my "criminal" ancestor's photos and letters.

"Here are the court documents, copies of them, anyway. The originals are displayed for the festival, including the actual gun that fired the shot, and photos of the hanging."

"I saw them. Gruesome, but a nice composition."

She skimmed through the documents and said, "I was in law enforcement before we married, so this is all familiar to me. The evidence that your ancestor is guilty is circumstantial but voluminous, and there's a lot of damning testimony. I'm not a lawyer, but it seems like the defense attorney gave no alternative theory about the killing, and the law officers produced no other suspects. So, where's your proof he's innocent?"

"In the photographs. My brother patented a process of using Artificial Intelligence for facial recognition of people in old photographs. So, as is often the case, you have a picture that was stashed away in your grandmother's things. But the photo isn't labeled, and you don't know who the person is. It could be anybody. Could be a friend, relative, or just a random photo. The picture has no value other than your grandmother kept it. By scanning the photo and comparing it to known and identified people, you can establish a relationship. It's like a genetic code, except we don't have the DNA of ordinary people from the past.

"So, I have two photographs—these are photocopies from the digital scans of the originals—and the supporting connections, which show my ancestor was in Portland at the time of the murder and couldn't possibly have pulled the trigger."

"Hmmm. Fascinating. I want to look at these more closely with my husband. Can we stop by later this evening? I don't want to rush this. You are such an asset to the world of historical research and preservation. And your brother's work and the resources and tools he's given us; it would be enjoyable to see what you have."

"Thank you. I'll take these inside to my work table."

Friday, May 8, Evening

Jonathan Examines the Evidence

Isobel Barron and her husband, Jonathan, arrived promptly at the museum at 8:PM and I led them to my workspace in the basement. My boyfriend Caleb had brought dinner earlier, which we shared at a corner of the large central table, and he had just finished washing up at the kitchenette.

"She spends a lot of time here after hours," he said, "so she made it homey."

"The candles are a nice touch," Isobel said.

We introduced ourselves and each other around the circle. Jonathan Barron was carrying a child of about two, named Lucy, who was half asleep as she hung around her father's neck. Isobel spread a blanket on the floor out of the way, and her husband put the child down. The child snuggled into the follow-up blanket and fell asleep the other half of the way.

And inexplicably, Mr. Barron walked up and gave me an unabashed hug, like I was an old friend. A person I had never met and knew nothing about. Even his wife looked confused, as if this was something out of the ordinary for him.

There was no time to ponder this. I invited my guests to gather around the work table. Mr. Barron said little, but I could tell he was noticing everything in the room, and as I imagined, every tiny detail, even of how we acted and the feelings behind our actions. I thought he might be a federal marshal or even a private bounty hunter, but rather than suspicion, his baseline attitude was that of curiosity, friendliness, and amusement. He and Caleb had a lot in common that way. They were not people who were easily surprised or shocked. Or intimidated.

"I've read everything I can find about the murder," I said. "The accounts contain a few contradictions and inconsistencies, but the main thread—the one resulting in the guilty verdict against my ancestor—is this:

"Nathanial Balch was a wealthy Virginia plantation owner in the 1830's and early '40s. A shrewd man, he foresaw war

coming, and the abolition of slavery, and realized he needed to sell out while slave prices were good and normal business proceeded profitably. Wishing to hurry west, he sold his land and slaves quickly, breaking up families. He converted his money into gold and hired men to accompany him to Oregon by wagon train.

"Being a businessman, he knew the value of social engagement, and frequently entertained. One of his guests, my ancestor, George Coe Duniway, was a frequent visitor to the Balch home. The official story is that Duniway had heard rumors about the Balch treasure and noticed small, heavy kegs tucked away in corners of his house. He supposed the treasure was kept in those kegs. Banks were rare and untrustworthy in those days. Duniway, a dry goods store owner, then conspired with a William Cain, a clerk at the store, and a frequent gadabout with his tintype hobby, to murder Balch and steal the gold."

"Lots of new names all at once," Mr. Barron said.

"Sorry. There are only three. Here's a list I made for you."

✓George Duniway, my ancestor falsely accused, convicted, and hanged.

✓William Cain, also accused and hanged.

✓Nathanial Balch, former slave holder. The murdered man.

"These are details of the official story: on the evening of January 9, 1865, Duniway and Cain blackened their faces with soot at a nearby barn to disguise themselves as Negroes. When they came to Balch's gate, Cain stayed behind, while Duniway knocked on the door and asked directions to Balch's son's house. Balch stepped into his front yard to point the way, and Duniway shoved him down, and Cain killed him with a shot to the heart. Beale, I mean Balch, Nathaniel Balch, was 71 years old. There are different accounts of the death, and the finer details don't matter for now. The only "first-hand witness" was a 12 year old negro girl who lived with Balch. She had taken the dog and hidden.

"Some of the stolen treasure was found, and most of what people believed existed was not found. Or maybe it was. One

guy… Oh, never mind; it's too much to go into now. For decades afterwards, random people searched and dug for the gold, and it's hard to know exactly what the truth is."

"Romance, mystery, and legend enough to warrant an annual festival," Mr. Barron said. "Tell me about your ancestor, George Duniway."

"He migrated to Oregon in 1851 with one of the wagon trains and married a girl here. He was an outspoken abolitionist and opposed the so-called Exclusion Laws that forced formerly enslaved black people to leave Oregon. He travelled frequently and left Cain to run the store.

"The original photographs are safe in the archives of Henry Failing, first elected mayor of Portland in 1864. He was a businessman and kept meticulous accounts. Like my grandmother, he kept everything. The photograph in the newspaper clipping here is of Mayor Failing giving a speech about his intention to fund gas street lights for the growing city. Duniway, among others, is standing beside him. Duniway is the gentleman, here, looking straight at the camera. I'm guessing he's hoping to talk to the mayor afterwards about slavery and Native American Rights. The photographs gave me what I needed to explain the stagecoach ticket stubs to Portland that my brother scanned."

"Duniway. What do you think happened?"

"Balch was not a good man. The armed men he 'hired' to bring him west were slaves he hadn't sold. Balch kept negro mistresses and female helpers, including the 12-year-old girl. Cain and the slaves conspired to rob Balch, steal the gold, and frame Duniway, the abolitionist. They didn't count on the girl telling only half of the lie and giving Cain's name."

"What proof do you have of your version of events?"

"It's only a theory. However, I have this set of Cain's photographs. Despite his disreputable character, he was intelligent and talented. These images of the murder victim appear to have been made in front of his house. I think what really happened was Cain had arranged for the photography session as a distraction while others quietly searched the house for the treasure."

"So, these pictures show the last minutes of Balch's life."

"Yes. And my version contradicts the official story."

"I can see the logical train of evidence," Mr. Barron said after glancing across the photos and documents in one encompassing sweep. "It's without any holes. Perfectly flawless." He shrugged his shoulders. "The problem naturally isn't with your proof of innocence, but the entrenched investments in the false story. I don't know how to change this, short of a publicity war."

"Which I don't want."

"The best you can hope for, then, is to insert your story into the history."

"Into the festival, you mean."

"Yes."

"That would mean cancelling the reenactment of the hanging. Mr. Beale wouldn't allow it. It's what makes the festival such a success."

Mr. Barron laughed, which hit me wrong.

"A hanging isn't something to joke about," I said.

"I was thinking of rigging the reenactment so it would horrify people enough to give them nightmares for the rest of their lives. I have friends who could arrange this. That would stop any future reenactments."

"Not the way I want. Is this what you mean by exotic?" I said in Mrs. Barron's direction.

"I know, I'm sorry," Mr. Barron said. "I have an inappropriate sense of humor. With help, I could realistically fake an execution, but in all seriousness, I never fake anything. It would destroy my reputation. Your insurmountable problem is human nature, but add to it the same problem as with George Duniway's legal defense. You have no provable alternate theory for Balch's murder."

"All the witnesses lied."

"Who really pulled the trigger?"

I shook my head. "Nobody knows. Nobody saw it. Nobody heard it. Nobody pulled it."

"But he died from a bullet wound."

"He did."

"Suicide? The black girl killed him?"

"Too much contrary evidence. Supposedly, the sheriff's men found a hatband belonging to Duniway and the bark charcoal Cain and Duniway used to color their skin. In a nearby barn."

"Thanks for sharing all this. You have all my moral support, but it's not worth much. I wish I could help, but I don't know what I can do. The story doesn't fit into what I cover in my investigations. So, even if you wanted publicity, it would be out of character for me to do such a story on my radio program. Regular news media would work just as well for you, probably better."

I felt a huge disappointment, though I can't say I had a good reason. I knew telling him and Mrs. Barron wasn't going to help me, but next he said something that wiped away my gloom and touched part of me that was more important than my job or the specific history of my falsely accused ancestor. They—what he asked about—were why I studied history and the historical method in the first place.

"I'd like to take a look at your other pictures," he said. "I noticed you have some spread out and organized on your table. May I?"

"Of course. Just don't mix up the piles. I'm putting a book together. A family album."

Mr. Barron sat down in my place, and as he studied first one and then another of the photos, he took on an intense, focused look which soon relaxed into what I call a mild, gentle ecstasy. I knew what he was experiencing, and I wondered then about a connection he must have touched when he gave me a hug. This went on for several minutes.

Isobel Barron had settled down on the floor next to the child and seemed to have fallen asleep. Wax from the candles dripped down their sides and threatened to run onto the table.

"I need to leave," Caleb whispered in my ear. "I have work early—"

"Shhh!" Mr. Barron shushed.

Caleb kissed me on the cheek and tiptoed from the room. A minute later, I could hear his big truck starting outside the house and his growling engine fading down the road.

Mr. Barron continued studying the photographs, oblivious to the passage of time.

"I feel the same way," I said quietly, and knowing I wouldn't be shushed. "Those people in the pictures are real. I wonder what their lives are like then. What the world around them was like. My grandmother and grandfather, my mom and dad, my aunt, all my uncles. They had full and busy lives long before I was born. So many adventures, hardships and risks, and unknowns. And it's all gone out of our reach now except for those images. My mother, full of mischief and intelligence and her smart, cutting retorts. That photograph you are holding is my grandma holding me as a baby, gazing with her eyes full of happiness and joy. I was so much loved. It makes me cry if I think about it too much. I miss them. I wish I could talk to them now. To know them when they were young. To talk with them and observe them. That past is part of my life, but out of my reach, inaccessible except by imagination."

Mr. Barron replaced a picture of my grandfather as a boy to its stack and said, "I want to enter into the photograph and walk around. I want to see, smell, and hear everything alive. I want to talk with your grandfather, the boy."

"And give him a hug. And thank him for the little bags of peanuts he always carried in his pockets for my brother and me."

"Yeah, and give him a hug."

Mrs. Barron might have been half-asleep, but she was at least half-listening and sat up, looked around bleary-eyed, and then lay back down again.

Mr. Barron laughed a little and answered the question I'd been thinking. "She's curious. She's not jealous of my friendships with other women because she knows how loyal I am to her."

"That's right," she mumbled from her bed on the floor.

Mr. Barron laughed again and said, "So, I'm not afraid to say to you, Melinda, that I've never met anyone who can see so much in a photograph as you do."

"Tell her of your 'woo, woo' ideas," Mrs. Barron said, now getting up, stretching, and taking a seat at the table. She yawned. The child woke and crawled up into her lap.

"She means ideas that are not real. Creative imaginings help us understand reality. I'm going to draw from my bank of allusions—not illusions with an I, but allusions with an A—and

say that your keen perception makes me think of literature and film where a photograph or image is a portal to another world or time, crossing the eidetic plane. You know, like Jack Finney's book Time and Again or Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking Glass."

"Or portrait paintings where ghosts live," I said. "Or like the Picture of Dorian Grey, the gothic novel by Oscar Wilde."

"Yes. The ideas in these works are fanciful and entertaining, but they touch upon a truly powerful effect that photographs work in us, and in you more than most people."

"Photographs are types of icons," I said, "within the true historical meaning of iconography. When I look into the eyes of my Great x3 grandfather, George Duniway, staring at the camera, I can believe that he is thinking of me alive now, a century and a half later. I want to help him, to save his life if I can."

"I wish I could help you," he said with more overt kindness than I've ever heard anyone express to me personally.

"It's been helpful having your understanding."

Mrs. Barron began collecting the child and stood up watching her husband expectantly—the signal that it was time for them to leave.

He didn't move, and she said, "I have something for you, Melinda." She dipped into her bag and handed me a business card. "This is his. If something really strange or unusual ever happens, call. That's when he can help. My number is on the back."

I stared at the card blankly. "I can't figure out what you mean. If our story isn't strange enough, how will I know what is?"

"Oh, you will know," she said. "You will know."

"And I'll drop everything and come," Mr. Barron said.

"Mommy," the child said in an adorable, sweet voice. "Want to see the dolls."

"What's this?" I asked.

"Oh, I told her about your bedroom here with a crib full of old dolls. Would you mind us looking in before we leave?"

"Be my guest. I'll turn on the lights."

Saturday, May 9

Sidney Smith's Awkwardness

The weekends are always busy at the museum because of the tourists and out-of-towners. The part-time Assistant Director, Alice, because she's been here so long, has a contract to be free on weekends, so I usually work them and take off Mondays and Tuesdays. But because of my bad mood and confusion about my future, I asked Sidney to fill in for me on Sunday. I needed to think. Sidney Smith must have been one of those people who volunteers for the wrong reasons. Most volunteers are kind people who share our vision and want their lives to be meaningful. Sidney seemed to serve out of duty and guilt—from a formal sense of earning the necessary divine brownie points. Don't misunderstand me, because the work he performed was invaluable, but on the other hand, his surly, resentful attitude often kept me from asking him to do anything not already on his regular program.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'll fill in for you," he said, angrily. "But this will be the last time."

It would also happen to be the first time.

By the end of the day Saturday, which, between supervising the docents and troubleshooting parking issues, I fielded phone calls about preparations for the upcoming festival. And I decided to quit at the museum. I made the announcement quietly to myself in my office with the door closed. After I would talk with Caleb on Sunday morning, I'd turn in my resignation on Monday morning.

On Saturday night at my apartment, I had one of those dreams where you move through your memories—detailed images of places that no longer exist.

Sunday, May 10
A Revelation and a New Mission

Though the decision to quit my job dipped into my 'well of sadness,' as the poets say, it also gave me an immense feeling of relief. I was sure Caleb would be sympathetic and say we could still get married and make it on one income for a while, and maybe we could start adding to the family sooner than we expected. Caleb had worked all day Saturday, and when he picked me up for church it was the first time I'd seen him since Friday evening.

We planned a picnic at the cemetery for afterwards, and on the drive there in his truck, he said, "You've been quiet all morning. You didn't answer my call on Saturday night.

"It's true."

"Just a mysterious text about needing to talk."

"And a picnic date proposal."

I told him then about my decision. He was quiet for a while, and then erupted in anger. I cried. He apologized, gave me a hug, and said he didn't want to lose me, for me to move away. And his work was always tough. We prayed, ate our picnic at a shady spot near my and his family graves, and then said he was leaving to talk with somebody about an urgent ditch connecting our new house to the electricity grid.

"Are you okay walking home?" he asked. "It might be a chance for you to think more."

"That's fine," I said, as a text came through. It was the President of the Museum, Danford Beale.

"Grapevine says you might be quitting," it said. "Fine, but you must stay through the festival, the whole festival."

Caleb could tell I was upset. "Who's that? Let me see?"

I gave him my phone, and he erupted again, only at Beale and bigger this time. I cried. I erupted. I apologized. When he had calmed down enough to speak civilly, he said. "Grapevine. He means that villain, Sidney Smith. Why didn't you fire him long ago? How did Beale find out? A lucky guess?"

"Maybe because I asked Sidney to substitute for me today."

Caleb gave me a kiss, unreciprocated in my present mood, said he'd call me later in the evening, asked if I was sure I was okay with walking, and he drove away, his truck making that sweet growl it always does through the exhaust pipes.

The cemetery lay south of the town center, and my apartment was only four miles away on the north side of town. Not a long walk on a day when nothing urgent pressed upon me. I was feeling sad over the possibility I'd be moving away for another job, and my mind drifted towards saying goodbye to the place. I didn't consciously decide to linger at the cemetery and study the brief, engraved summaries of the lives of those who rested there. Nor did I plan a route through the parks and neighborhoods I had never visited before. And if I stared at the faces of the residents who, like me, were enjoying a relaxing, fresh spring afternoon outdoors, I was not aware. At least I didn't notice until when I was cutting through a trailer park, and a boy whisked by me on a bicycle and called, "Watch out, sweetheart!" After he passed, he glanced over his shoulder, flashing a mischievous grin that said, "All in good fun," before standing on his pedals and speeding away.

I had seen the exact face and the same grin before.

In a photograph of my grandfather as a boy.

I had to step over and hold onto a post of an unpainted privacy fence to stop the world from whirling around. Yes, I was still in the trailer park and not at my work table at the museum. It was still the early 21st century. Nothing had changed. But my grandfather, or another person in his image as a boy, miraculously lived now in the present. I was sure.

And then, as I thought back to the other people I had seen today at the cemetery, and the people I had passed on my walk, I remembered that they looked familiar. Maybe I had seen them before at the grocery store or at church. Maybe I had seen them at the museum, but two or three others were people in the photos I had been looking at for the past few months, and some—family members from the past, for years. I was excited and scared.

The rest of my return home became a mission.

I arrived in the twilight of evening, plucked the card of Jonathan Barron from my key basket, flipped it over, and called Isobel, his wife.

The call rang and rang and eventually went to voicemail. Depressed suddenly, I didn't leave a message. My enthusiasm died all of a sudden as I realized with force that everything in life plodded along at its own pace, regardless of our own frantic urgency.

When Isobel called me back a few minutes later and without waiting, said, "I was expecting to hear from you. You saw something, right?" I was now quite excited again.

I explained what I saw, and she said, "I believe you, but Jonathan will need more information. Did you take any pictures of the people today?"

"I snuck a few."

"Run them through your brother's facial ID program and email Jonathan the results. We're watching a movie with our son, but when they take a break, I tell him to look for your message. Just send the results, whatever they are."

"What movie are you watching?"

"It's called 'Frequency'. It's based on a true story."

My laptop contained everything I needed, and I did as she said. I had eight usable photographs from my walk, and as I had already guessed, seven of them were 90% matches or higher. The one of the couple sitting on their front porch was 100% of my great-grandparents. 20 minutes later, Jonathan called, breathless.

When I told him what I found, he said, "I need to get back to the movie, but I'll be there in Yoncalla Tuesday night. Isobel and our children will come later. She's making arrangements now. I'm going to sleep in my rental car, but can they stay at your apartment when they arrive? Everything will be booked 100 miles in every direction for the festival."

"Sure. It will be tight, but sure."

"So, don't tell anyone what you've discovered."

"Not even my fiancé, Caleb?"

"For now, don't tell him. And whatever you do, don't turn in your resignation tomorrow morning, as you planned. Don't turn it in at all, not yet. I need to see for myself what you are seeing

and figure it all out, if possible. I think something big will happen this coming Festival weekend, but I have no idea what."

After we hung up, I realized that if I'm going to quit, it doesn't matter if we bring publicity to the truth. As long as I quit before I'm fired.

My mind was spinning, but I knew if I closed my eyes, I'd be asleep in a wink. And then an overlooked task smacked me in the face. I re-opened up my napping laptop and typed in Jonathan T. Barron's web address.

Oh, my gosh! I couldn't believe who he was. What mess was I diving into?

Monday – Wednesday, May 11-13
The Days Nearing Festival Weekend

As I mentioned earlier, I usually take off Mondays and Tuesdays, during which the museum is often closed, but it just wouldn't be possible during Festival Week. I showed up at 9:AM on Monday (We were to open at 10:AM), and shortly afterwards, Beale passed through the creaking front door and politely asked me if I had written my letter of resignation.

"What letter of resignation?"

He froze at this, not willing to elaborate on his unreliable, secret source of information.

"If and when I quit, you'll be notified in writing by me, and no one else," I said, smartly. "And certainly not by Grapevine. But, if I am quitting, I'll work through the weekend as you requested and more, give you a month's notice."

"A month won't be necessary. No notice required. After the festival, things slow down."

"Thanks," I said and returned to composing a press release.

He seemed reluctant to leave, suspicious that I didn't try to argue with him about the reenactment. "Anything new on your research into the murder of Nate Balch?"

"Nothing else conclusive yet. There was one other hanging in Oregon in 1865. In Grant County."

Beale stepped around my desk and leaned in toward my laptop screen. I was ready for him, and silently, deftly, minimized the press release's rough draft to show a list of historical murders and executions.

"Hmmm," he reflected and straightened up. "If you plan to say anything publicly about your version of our story, please wait until after the festival, okay?"

"You mean, to give you a full year to recover before the next festival?"

"We'll see. We should probably recalibrate the hanging reenactment for next year. Honestly, it is somewhat regressive, and the climate in our state is changing. Maybe we should run a parade instead; awards for the best floats."

Right at "climate," I knew he was lying. Trying to placate me so I wouldn't go public before the coming weekend.

After he left, I began to wonder if I hadn't seen *him* before in one of the historical photographs. I ran downstairs to my work table to help picture where this photo might be, and then I noticed the folder holding the sample copy of the exculpatory photo of my ancestor was missing. Had I mislaid it? And where? No matter for now; I had everything in high resolution on my laptop.

The remainder of Monday, and Tuesday and Wednesday presented no unexpected events. I didn't have much to do, other than run the museum on extended evening hours and get ready for the Barron family. Caleb said that since our new house had electricity now and a Certificate of Occupancy, they could stay there up in the hills. We took foam mattresses and linens out to the house early on Tuesday, and some spare cooking and dinnerware.

Festival vendors began arriving in Yoncalla and setting up on Tuesday afternoon when the City closed down the main streets of town. Portable toilets arrived later and were strategically placed.

Expected but no less horrifying was the construction of the gallows and its platform in the Town Square. The framework, decking, and ropes, kept in an old barn all the year like any other holiday event, were cleared of dust and hauled in by trucks.

Bang, bang, bang, of hammers and the whine of electric drills. The occasional scream of a power saw. All day, every day. It took forever. With all the noise Beale's migrant crews made, accompanied by peppy Mexican music on a portable player, they could have built it three or four times. I avoided passing by the square when I could, but it was right outside my window. Printed posters appeared on power poles all over town, proclaiming "HANG THE TYRANT!!!" The police took them down.

Caleb sent Mr. Barron driving instructions and told him where the key was hidden so he could let himself in. He arrived there after midnight, as his text showed when I opened up my phone in the morning on Wednesday.

It said: "Plan to look around Yoncalla by myself later today after I sleep. I'll let you know when I'm ready to talk. Can't predict when. I might need an extra day. This is exciting!"

Thursday, May 14

The Blind Bandit Hideaway

Mr. Barron didn't call until late in the day on Thursday after not giving me a peep, and wanted to meet at the museum right away. I told him it wasn't possible so soon, and since the Festival was in full swing, there'd be a country-western band playing on the main stage next to the gallows until 10 PM, so it would be loud. He said he'd arrive by 10:30 and asked if I could make coffee.

"You keep odd hours, Mr. Barron."

"I'm— I learned something that's happening tomorrow at 2 in the morning. I want to be there. Did you know that the re-enactors plan a walk-through followed by a full dress rehearsal of the hanging at the gallows?"

"I did not know that," I said, shocked. "I'm not going."

"They've notified the police, who said it was okay, as long as they didn't bring a crowd."

"Oh. How could this be any worse?"

"It's not over yet."

"I've read about your cases. Strange things happen during your radio broadcasts. Real, or not, strange things. Are you planning to broadcast from Yoncalla, Mr. Barron?"

"Let's talk about this when we meet. Bring your fiancé, Caleb. You gave me an idea for a theory. And what I'm thinking will make the festival seem trivial."

"Caleb couldn't make it," I said to Mr. Barron when I met him at the museum later that evening. "'Work early tomorrow,' Caleb told me. True, but if not for the strain between us, he'd be here."

"Because you're quitting your job?"

"Because I might be moving away."

"It'd be a shame. The house Caleb built for you is a beautiful work. And the stunning location."

"He and I aren't communicating well right now."

"Let's hope everything turns out for the best. Say, is there a pubic spot we can talk?"

"My favorite place in Yoncalla is the Blind Bandit Hideaway. This time of night, they keep Quiet Hours. Their playlist after 11 PM is relaxing and meditative. There's a speaker in every booth with volume control. They also developed an app that allows guests at a table to converse among themselves through headphones. It's not far. We can walk."

"Do they have fresh coffee this late?"

"Coffee stout."

"That will do."

I knew he felt uncomfortable meeting me alone in private, or maybe he didn't want me to be uncomfortable. Or both. Didn't matter to me, but it might to Caleb at the moment. I'd welcome the cheerful, restful atmosphere.

We strolled along. The town was very much alive despite the late hour. Many of the vendors were bedding down in their booths for the night. Here and there glowed small campfires, and around them a circle of silent folks. One guy was singing cowboy songs and playing guitar. Near the pub, someone was playing mournful tunes on a fiddle.

"When's your family arriving?" I asked. "Remind me, please. My head is so full of stuff."

"Tomorrow morning. Isobel is visiting a few more museums on the West Coast. She and I have been trading Lucy back and forth, and she's picking up Scotty before she comes here. Where's your family? Anyone who lives around here?"

"My father passed away soon after my brother. My mother… I don't know where my mother is. She remarried some royal loser in Europe. I don't have any living siblings I know of. I have a cousin in the east somewhere. We are on friendly terms, but never communicate."

"So, all you have now is Caleb."

"And his kin. But I have the photographs. My family is in them. What about you?"

"Isobel and the children, of course. I have friends with whom I work. My siblings, parents, uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, there's a lot of them—many I don't even know about—but they're off-grid. And I've lost touch."

"Are they technically disconnected or socially reclusive?"

"Both, but not eccentric in a conventional way. They're wealthy enough to remain invisible to the world. They live how they wish. I don't know much about them. Left home at 18."

"There's a Masonic cemetery in Yoncalla."

He looked at me sharply and paused before saying, "They're not Masons."

"I don't mean to pry."

"I've never told anyone what I told you just now. No one knows. Excluding Isobel. I can't keep secrets from her. If I don't tell her, she'll figure it out anyway."

While we waited for a booth, Mr. Barron roamed around the inside perimeter of the pub, studying the artwork on the walls with the same focused intensity and joy he exuded when he viewed my historical photos at our basement work table. And no wonder.

"These are your photographs!" he said when he found me at our booth next to the stage.

"The pub asked me for permission for certain images, then they enlarged and framed them. These are the primary pioneer families who settled this region. I also gave them ideas on décor. Being a museum director requires interior decorating skills."

"And an artistic eye," he said as he glanced at his watch.

"I've ordered your coffee stout. I'm having a brown ale."

"OK," he said when the frosty pint glasses arrived and the waiter scampered away. "Here's what I think. This is my theory about the familiar faces of strangers you've never seen before."

He took a sip. "Hmmm, good. Real coffee."

"First, this is not cloning," he went on. "But it could be. It would be possible to collect DNA from uncleaned vintage jewelry and reproduce the form of a person. There are all kinds of reasons cloning of humans isn't performed on that scale.

"Second, it is not reincarnation. I'm skeptical of reincarnation being real, and even if it was, reincarnation is not reproducing a form of a person, but a recycling of the mystical essence of a person, and it usually would take a different form.

"What we are seeing is the recreation or reappearance of the *patterns* of people. It's like having twins, genetically identical but living in different environments. In this case, the environments are separated by decades and centuries. And with the passage of time, changes in culture, technology, and social conditions. Everything, in fact."

"You mean like if you took my grandfather as a boy born to the same parents, and placed them not in Oregon in the early 1900s, but in the early 2,000s."

"It's not your grandfather, but his image, his ideation—the idea of his template, his physical essence, subject to all the environmental, cultural differences between then and now." Here, Mr. Barron stood up and paced up and down before our booth. "It's like time travel, or transcendence, but without the problems inherent in time travel that cause catastrophic alterations to the original timeline. It's a projection of an eidetic plane."

"Why is this happening?"

"It can't be because the Creator is running out of ideas. I think it's been happening all the time throughout history, but humans didn't notice until now. Facial ID, internet, increasing

population and mobility. You have a highly developed gift for recognition. And rare, too, I should add."

"All those hours as a child studying pictures with my brother, and then my historical work."

We sat a while without speaking. One of the pub patrons asked Mr. Barron for an autograph. He smiled, and while he signed a paper menu, the fan asked, "Are you broadcasting from the Festival, Jonathan T. Barron?"

"I might," he said, and his fan retreated without fanfare.

"*Shall* I do a broadcast? It's up to you. We can mention my theory, but the subject requires a scientific approach to document how common pattern reproduction is in humans. It's almost universal in certain animal species. This in itself might not justify a dedicated broadcast, but it's interesting enough to complement your new perspective of the festival's history."

"And the macabre spectacle of the hanging."

"Of course. My audience will be entertained by it, but they'll also feel cheated if that's the focus. They don't expect to be used for influencing public opinion."

"What do they expect, Mr. Barron?"

He took a deep breath. "You and I are satisfied that there are connections between the past and the present. Emotional connections through photographs, and the repetition of the patterns of individual people, but I'm wondering if those connections also include specific events."

"History repeats."

"That concerns me. In the present case, history is this: robbery, bloody murder, and violent public executions."

"Then, do the broadcast. You'll be a witness."

"I brought my mobile equipment."

"I'm sending out my press release first thing in the morning. It'll go all over the state and probably to the national networks. But, I fear it might activate a firestorm."

Friday, May 15
Tensions Build

By the time we left the Hideaway, it was past midnight. Mr. Barron said he would try to nap in his rental car until the rehearsal time. Since it was so late, I decided to sleep at the museum in my usual emergency bivouac, the pioneer bed on the second floor in the corner bedroom—the room with a crib full of dolls. The pioneer bed was tiny and rock hard, but I pulled a custom mattress topper out of a closet, which made it tolerable. For a blanket, I used my cozy crazy quilt I found at the thrift store in town.

I never understood exactly how we fall asleep, but I know one way we wake up. Sudden percussive noise that penetrates the wall of unconsciousness. The blue lights that had pulsed in my brain, when I squinted through bleary eyes, now were flashing on the walls of the bedroom. My heart raced. Was this a UFO invasion over Yoncalla? Jonathan Barron! I jumped from the bed and peered between the lace curtains. Police cars.

The grandfather clock downstairs somberly struck three.

I wrapped up in the quilt and stepped outside for a closer look. A smoky firecracker popped, and a nearby cluster of skinny, shadowy, darkly-dressed space aliens under a streetlight started up a chant. "HANG. THE. TY-RANT! HANG. THE. TY-RANT!" I walked closer toward the town square and found the gallows encircled by a strand of police tape and attended by two or three uniformed officers with flashlights.

One of the officers was talking with Mr. Barron, who when I came up, turned to me and said, "Good morning, Miss Sunshine." The officer said, "Good luck" and moved away.

"Apparently, the re-enactors never arrived, but a rowdy crowd did. The officer just told me that the someone in the department who leaked the too juicy tidbit will be duly apprehended and disciplined."

"Who were the chanting people?"

"They go by the name Aunty Fawny."

"Weird."

"Maybe I didn't hear them right. Don't repeat this, but the officer said they won't be back."

"Oh. Well. Good for them."

He yawned. "I'm driving out to your house for real sleep."

I yawned back. "I never imagined a small town museum would be so scary. So wearing."

He smiled and patted me on the shoulder. "Someday, you'll look back and laugh."

"But meanwhile."

"Meanwhile, it's hard. A little sleep will make it easier."

Someone pounding on the bedroom door; then a muffled voice. "Excuse me, ma'am, but visitors want to tour the museum."

I opened my eyes.

"It's 10:AM, darling," Sidney said, his tone loaded with snark. "Ready or not, I'm opening the front doors." His footsteps thundered down the stairs.

Oh, my gosh. I had overslept in the pioneer bed. I threw the quilt back and swung my feet onto the floor. I found the skeleton key hanging on a peg in the supply closet and locked the bedroom door from the inside. When I was dressed, and the bed made, and my quilt folded away, I opened the door. A cluster of miscellaneous high school students was standing right there, the male teacher's hand poised to knock.

Caught off guard, I said, "Welcome, humans. We were just sprucing up the bedroom for you."

The audible twittering continued upstairs even as I locked my office door and closed the transom window. Two hours late, but not too late to send my nearly perfected press release.

Re-read. Fix this thing. Send and done. I closed my laptop, reopened my office door, put on some relaxing music, and sat at my desk with my eyes closed and hands folded, waiting for the phone to buzz and the emails to chime.

I waited.

Nothing.

Suddenly, fear of being fired took over, and I reopened the laptop and emailed my pre-prepared resignation letter to Beale.

I waited until I started nodding off and decided to eat breakfast. Our kitchenette in the basement was well supplied with easy-to-fix food, so after instant oatmeal, a banana, a cold hard-boiled egg, and coffee, I felt better, enough to face the onslaught, but when I returned to my office, still nothing.

Maybe if I had included less material in my press release and began with a concise summary, reporters and editors would have processed it faster. Little did I know, as I learned later, that Beale had already sent out a response to mine and threatened legal action against the big media outlets if they gave my press release any coverage whatever.

However, some of the smaller mom and pop outlets, lacking staff, money, and being immune to threats, simply posted my entire press release online verbatim and without comment, but under a blazingly sensational headline.

Word spread throughout the day.

Even before the full weekend arrived, the revealed controversy was sucking crowds into the Festival from nearby towns and creating interest all over the West Coast. It was my first Festival, but I felt like by Friday afternoon, the numbers swarming into Yoncalla were dwarfing previous attendance records. All the docents and other locals confirmed as much. It certainly broke the record at the museum, where I hunkered down all day, performing my usual jobs. We were swamped. Even the 4th of July last year allowed me time to get outside. I had hoped to see one of the cowboy shows, and especially the Buster Keaton impersonator, who was to ride into town in the afternoon, performing stunts on top of a steam engine train.

Caleb had driven me into work early in the morning on Thursday, and I didn't see any Barrons at all during daylight on Friday, nor Caleb again until he picked me up after sunset. We both were exhausted—he said police and volunteer fireman had their hands full non-stop—and we didn't talk much. It was enough that we were together. And it seemed we were ready to be at peace. After a light, silent supper, Caleb tucked me into bed like he always did since we became engaged, and left for his own place.

Saturday, May 16
The Elktons, Dueling Press Conferences

Caleb had left his house early, and I slept in, so I drove myself into work. After such a dull breakfast on Friday, I thought I'd treat myself to brunch at the Chuck Wagon Breakfast Cookout at the skating park.

The day was turning into one of those summery classics of the coastal regions: a cool, dewy morning that would evaporate into a dry, hot afternoon. Except it was May, and the afternoon temperatures only in the comfortable 80s. We had had plenty of rain earlier in the spring, irrigating all the green grass and pastures—a morning for a brisk walk.

The Cookout was a huge annual fundraiser for the Yoncalla fire department. The local Chuck Wagon restaurant had set up a massive tent at the skate park and was serving all day long. If you love greasy, high protein, peppery, toasty, smoky, savory, sweet, colorful, chewy, crunchy, salty, buttery, fluffy, cheesy, and delicious, the Boy Scout volunteers heaped your double paper plate from the long line of steaming stainless steel tubs, while the firemen and their wives slaved over the outdoor grills and griddles.

Caleb, among the firemen, brought a plate to join me.

"I hoped you'd be here," he said as he folded his legs under the picnic table. "I've been thinking all week."

A moment later, one of the Scouts brought us a tray with coffee and a pitcher of orange juice.

"A lot has happened since our picnic."

"Let me tell you what I'm thinking," he began. "And this is why I was so upset, and I'm sorry I took it out on you. I hope to start my own construction company. I like working with Dad and my brothers, and it's good money, but I want to move away from new construction and big remodels and get into restoration. That means less income, especially at first."

"I forgive you."

He leaned over and kissed me.

"Restoration dovetails with history. We'd be partners."

"I'd need to travel to find enough work. I'm bidding on two projects now; one is in town, the other at the coast, which would be an hour drive one-way. The jobs will each take a year or more, depending. The one in town, longer."

"Oh, my gosh. There he is!"

"Who?"

"The boy who looks like my grandfather. Next to the oversized wagon wheel. They're just sitting down."

"His parents are with him. Yep. That's them. I've been looking at your pictures, too."

"Oh, my gosh."

"There's something funny about old photographs. I've never noticed this before…" When he saw I wasn't listening, he said, "Why don't you talk with them?"

My mind flipped through a dozen conventional reasons this would be awkward, but when Caleb said, "They won't mind. They're good local people," I untangled myself from the picnic table, grabbed my orange juice and went over.

A bee had landed on the boy's plate. Attracted by the maple syrup, I think. The boy nudged the bee with his fingertip and it stepped onboard. The boy held the bee up to his face to examine it closer as it walked around, wondering where the syrup had gone. The boy was wearing a baggy-sleeved shirt, suspenders, a billed cap, and his plaid pant legs had been tucked into oversized boots.

"Hello," I said.

The dad nodded and looked away. The mom half-smiled.

Dad, my Great-grandfather, was wearing a jacket and a vest. His shirt was open at the neck, and a tail of his tie hung out of a pocket. Mom was wearing a gingham dress and an apron. Her bonnet strings hung out of a pocket of the apron.

"You're the lady who almost ran over me the other day," the boy said, and sent the bee away with a puff of breath.

"Tim, that's not what you told me, the mother, my Great-grandmother said. "You said—"

"You're pretty," Tim finished, beaming.

The dad harrumphed a curt chuckle. "The boy's precocious."

"We're the Elktons," the mom said, formally.

"I'm Melinda Waldo."

"She's the director of the Yoncalla Museum," Mr. Elkton reported. "Future former director, from what I've heard."

"Who told you?"

"The Grapevine."

"What's the Grapevine? An all-men social gossip club? When are your meetings? Are women allowed?"

Mr. Elkton harrumphed his curt chuckle. "She's precocious, too."

"What would you like to do when you grow up, Tim?"

Mr. Elkton now stared at me as if he was wondering why I took such an interest in his son. "Did the school counselor send you over?"

"Tim got suspended from school yesterday," Mrs. Elkton said, "The last day before summer vacation."

"He called the principal 'poop face,'" Mr. Elkton said, but without a chuckle.

"I said it to my friends. Not to him." Tim scanned the field of breakfast diners and said, "I'd like to be a fireman, or help in business with my dad."

Mr. Elkton rolled his eyes.

"Or be a turkey and sheep farmer, or a logger, or be a museum director like Miss Waldo, or make boots—I'd be a Made in the U.S.-of-A. boot maker."

"He could do any of those," Mr. Elkton said, putting his arm around the boy and pulling him to him, suddenly, genuinely proud of his son, who was so very unlike him.

"If he stays in school," Mrs. Elkton said, joining in the little hug, and Tim sheepishly peering out from under his cap.

We exchanged Nice Talking with Yous, and I returned to Caleb, barely able to see through my tears.

"What's wrong?"

I cried a little more, so happy and so sad. "I talked with my grandfather." I cried more, then took a breath and said, "I can't leave Yoncalla. I can't."

Caleb wrapped his arms around me. A few minutes later, he said, "You could teach history at the high school. Coach the girls basketball team."

I looked up. "I don't know anything about basketball."

"Just kidding. I went there, remember? I played football. They're still a powerhouse."

Tears overwhelmed me again. When I could speak, I said, "During the last years of my grandfather's life, he sat in a chair all day with a tiny poodle on his lap. The last time I saw him conscious, he was whistling at the nurse in the hospital."

On the walk back to the museum, a deafening, clattering, raucous, four-wheeled, sporty, two-seater Kraken from Hell skidded to a stop right beside me, on the wrong side of the road. I jammed my fingers in my ears. Danford Beale, in the driver's seat, revved the engine up to a screaming pitch and then let off the gas, sending the ill-tuned machinery into an irregular series of heart-stopping percussive cracks. Then he shut off the engine entirely.

"Whew. Sorry about the noise. I haven't had time to get this worked on."

"Yes? Can I help you?"

"Would you like to get in? It's my new, old Mercedes-Benz 220 SJR 'Umlaut-Coupé'. I want to see if OSP Troopers can keep up. It'll be a ride to tell your descendants about."

"No, thank you. I have work."

"There's a lot of history to this car. Made in 1954. Worth a fortune. Good as gold as an investment."

I said nothing in reply. But I noticed for the first time that he was attempting to cultivate a chin curtain facial growth. Abe Lincoln style. I assume for the festival.

"Do whatever you like," he said, and reached down to turn the key. The engine chugged and stopped, chugged again and blasted once like a cannon. He revved the engine as before, and with fingers in ears, I resumed my walk.

He drove along beside me a few feet, caught my eye, and shouted. I didn't catch every word, but I think the gist of what he said was: "I've gotten calls about your press release. It's professional, but it won't make a difference. I already have people in mind for your replacement."

Then he blasted away, his squealing tires marking the road and leaving behind a choking cloud of black and blue smoke.

By the time I reached the museum, I had stopped fuming. And then an unconscious perception flashed into sharp conscious focus. I raced past a fretting docent and down the stairs to the basement and flipped through a file. Yes. Danford Beale, the Yoncalla Historical Museum President, creator of the Duniway Festival, etc., resembled Nathaniel Balch, the man murdered in Yoncalla in January of 1865, whose murder, and the subsequent hangings of two innocent men, inspired the Festival.

My fascination with this new revelation and the questions it raised was completely killed by the sudden media barrage that had been building up and waiting while I had attended the Cookout, and it would follow for the rest of the day.

My voicemail was slammed. Sidney Smith, handyman, handed me a sheaf of handwritten notes with phone numbers which had been given to him by local reporters. My email storage had maxed out. I didn't even try to contemplate the text messages from originators not on my contact list. A television news crew pulled up outside and began unpacking their equipment. Worst of all, the museum visitors who looked at me with curious suspicion. I locked my office door and called Caleb and then Mr. Barron.

"Please, come help me," I begged them.

Sidney Smith reluctantly fended off the television crew.

Mr. Barron, who had been at the breakfast, and Caleb arrived in mere minutes and began reviewing all the comments and interview requests without me in the room, and I held a quick meeting with the docents in the hallway, where I handed out copies of my press release and asked them to stick to those points. I walked through the museum and made sure everything was okay. Though it galled me from the pit of my stomach, I put out more reprinted pamphlets of the faked confessions of Duniway and Cain.

I hated those, but they *were* historical documents. The glass protecting the display that told the story of the murder and subsequent hanging was smudged with hand and nose prints, so I cleaned that. I paused to gaze at the .44 caliber Remington revolver that killed Balch, and shook my head.

Caleb found me crying in a storage room. "It's lunch time. Mr. Barron suggested we meet with everyone. I hung the 'We'll be right back' sign on the office door. Sidney will mind the museum. Everyone's waiting."

My office was crowded, but there was room for everyone. Four docents were present, and one had left early. Mrs. Barron and the children arrived, followed by one of the board members—actually a former member who, oddly, had been born in Australia. I looked around. All I saw were sympathetic expressions.

Mr. Barron spoke, first introducing himself and his family, and then continuing: "Mr. Danford Beale's press conference concluded a few minutes ago. By and large, what we see is a deliberate campaign to destroy Melinda's reputation with the aim of fending off her carefully researched and documented historical work that calls the legitimacy of the Festival into doubt. Beale promised lawsuits, but when the story broke anyway, the press threw all caution out the window. Interest escalated as a result of the hostile rebuttal today to Miss Waldo's press release. Sadly, Beale's release appeals to the worst of human nature, in particular, in those who find entertainment value in the hanging reenactment."

"May I?" The former board member jumped in. "My name is Applegate—it's true, but I am *not* related to the pioneer family—and I teach U.S. history at the U of Oregon, and I want to assure Miss Waldo of my whole-hearted support. Her work is and always has been impeccable. I loved your press release, by the way. Speaking candidly, in my professional opinion, Danford Beale is a vicious, venomous snake. He's polite to your face, but when you look away, he'll bite you in the ass. He—"

"Okay, Okay. Thank you, Mr., Dr. Applegate," Mr. Barron interrupted. "The best strategy is to not give any individual interviews or independent statements (here he glanced at Applegate), but instead present a brief, carefully arranged press conference that point-by-point addresses the lies Beale has told.

I've written a statement that I'll show Miss Waldo for approval or amendment. We'll have Professor Applegate and any of the docents who wish to come, and Caleb and any of Miss Waldo's friends, sitting behind the podium with Miss Waldo, and I think she shouldn't say anything. Let us do the talking, if that's okay."

I nodded and said, "Sounds good to me."

"Your original press release refutes all the historical lies, and it makes it hard to believe Beale's new lies. That doesn't prevent the press from amplifying Beale's phony controversy and capitalizing on it."

When everyone was dispersing, I asked Mr. Barron to stay. "What new lies? About me?"

"I suppose you'll hear them anyway. I don't want you to be discouraged."

"You have to tell me."

"I recorded Beale's press conference." He handed me his phone, which I took to my desk.

The whole current Board of Directors of the Museum, their hands held neatly together before them, flanked Beale, who was standing at the podium. On the fringes stood people—Hispanic men, women, and children—who likely worked in his landscape business.

Beale fussed at the podium a full minute before beginning.

This was the same Beale I had known since my first interview for the job. He was polite, groomed neatly, and refined. Dignified. But there was a new facet to his character: something I had never seen before. You might expect it to be something creepy and sinister, but it was the opposite. His voice and manner expressed sorrow and regret, even shame: a fatherly interest in my well-being, which as he went on, had me doubting myself.

"He's good," Mr. Barron said.

What offset his manner, however, was that everything he said about me was untrue. Objectively false.

Here's an excerpt from what he said:

"I had my doubts about Miss Waldo from the beginning, that she was not our best candidate, but the board members, particularly Dr. Applegate, were deceived by her smooth presentation of herself, and in my weakness, I went along with

them. Then we later learned that she hadn't earned a PhD as she told us, but only a Master's Degree. As recently as a few weeks ago, some highly respected scholars suggested to me that she had plagiarized from their work. Her professional reputation and credibility further cascaded with hints of racism against indigenous people that were found within the text of her thesis. I was prepared to pause for time to investigate these charges myself, but further evidence of current, ongoing behavior has come to light that confirms everything I've said. I had asked Miss Waldo to simply resign, and we'd let the matter go quietly, but she's chosen to fight, and so… as tragic as this is…as heartbroken as I am, we must push back with the truth."

Unbelievably, but as convincing as it possibly could be, Beale choked up and cried through the end of this speech.

"Look at this," Mr. Barron said, rewinding and pinching the screen out for a close-up. "These are the landscape workers. Some of them are lifting and shifting their eyes slightly. They know Beale for a fake."

I was angry enough now to be calm and icy cold. "What's the new evidence?"

"I don't know yet."

"Maybe it's from Grapevine."

"Wait a second. Here's one last thing. This could be it. Beale during the Q&A session at the end. I had missed this part."

Beale answered: "Yes. It is true, sadly. Miss Waldo told me the reason she's against the popular historical reenactment is that one of the volunteer actors is a member of the trans community. They also regularly perform in their hobby as a Drag Queen. They'd be here today, but for fear of reprisals."

We hastily arranged to use the stage at the skate park for our press conference. The band scheduled to play at that hour said they would give us some of their time. Beale and his Festival Committee immediately cancelled the band's contract, but I think Mr. Barron compensated the musicians for their loss of income.

A mob of reporters had set up for the press conference, which drew additional spectators, so we had a crowd. Professor Applegate spoke spectacularly and refrained from remarks that could land him in court for defamation. Mr. Barron handled the questions, which chiefly were variations of, "Why doesn't Miss Waldo speak? Is she afraid? Does she hate people?" Mr. Barron brushed them all aside, but they had gotten under my skin, so even if we planned for me not to talk, I waited until the professor was winding up to a close, and I stepped up to the podium.

A hush fell over the crowd, and I froze up. Caleb saw this, and he, followed by everyone else behind me, gathered around. I pulled a piece of paper from my pocket and began.

"This nation was created by rugged, courageous, independent people who themselves, or their parents, left homes and family to face the dangers of crossing the ocean and building a life in what they called a new world. And we must not forget the people who lived on this continent before the colonists, strong, intelligent, skilled people who yet lived as all humans had done for thousands of years before. The newcomers built towns and cities in the east, and then other migrations of rugged people followed, across the prairies and mountains to the west. And other migrations followed since then. It's a great history, a great sifting.

"We here in west-central Oregon are part of that history. We are intimately connected to the past. We can trace our ancestry through the pioneers, adventurers, hunters, warriors, farmers, explorers, and builders of the past. Many of them died in their quests, and many children in infancy. Most of our ancestors were noble; some were not. Even the best of them were flawed. They invaded each other's lands. Some of them enslaved others. They fought among themselves over freedom. We also are flawed.

I've resigned as the Director of the Yoncalla Museum and History Center. My last day will be tomorrow. I've resigned myself to the resignation, and I'm leaving the job, but I wish to leave with those who follow me a challenge that I have always striven to meet: to never give up on a rigorous adherence to the historical method, to refrain from clinging to speculation, and to understand the science of knowing truth from fiction—there is such a thing, called 'epistemology', look it up.

"History is story, but true history is only primary sources and physical artifacts. Sometimes we fill in around the facts, but we should hold loosely to our imaginations. We as historians make new discoveries all the time. Therefore, historians are also explorers and pioneers. You never know what we will dig up. We might find surprise treasures worthy of celebration; we may find sordid acts we'd rather forget. There are dangers to the job, the truth is often hard, there is resistance, but keep in mind, historians are dangerous as well. I mean… it's hard to explain right now. Please don't take that the wrong way.

"I hope for the best for the museum, its board of directors, and all its generous supporters."

The audience applauded and cheered at the end, which confused the reporters. As I gathered my things, Mr. Barron gave me a shoulder hug and said, "Good job. You're the man." I stood away, clapped him on the shoulder, and said stoutly in a husky, low-pitched voice, "You're the lady." I resumed my normal self and said, "Most of the speech was from the introduction to my Master's Thesis. Professor Applegate encouraged me to bring it, just in case."

"What about the dangerous historians part?"

"That was in the thesis, too, but the rest of the 283 pages explained what I meant."

Mr. Barron was paying Caleb generously for staying in our new house, but he invited Caleb and me to join him and his family for the night. The men and Isobel, too, had suggested that we not stay in our own places. Caleb and his friends had spent nights there in the hills, and I had done the same with friends, but we'd never done this together.

A storm had blown in from the Pacific, so it was windy and wet, but warm, and we built a fire in the fireplace and opened the windows. The men cooked an elk stew, and after we ladies cleaned up, we gathered together in the den.

The Barron's son, Scotty, asked his dad to share some stories from his paranormal investigations.

"I won't go into too much detail, but I'll give you outlines of a few of my cases. Like who, what, where, and so on. These are not ones that were ever published, and not many people other than the principals even know about them. There are a couple reasons. The least important one is that they are so strange, nobody will believe them. More important is that they are so personal, no one involved in the case wanted them published. We didn't do radio programs on them, either."

"They're stranger than the cases you did publish?" I asked.

"Usually."

"Oh, my gosh."

"But you should understand that I myself didn't publish any of the cases. They were told to Mickey Hunt, a long acquaintance of mine, and he rendered them into stories and published through his company. And that's not his real name. The telling of the stories is only indirectly connected to me; I investigate, do the radio program, and give the written-story narrator the transcript. My role is limited."

"I gave Mickey the case about Greenland," Isobel said.

"And there are other cases given to him that he hasn't gotten around to writing yet."

"This is exciting. So, it's up to me if I share my story?"

"But it's not over yet, so let's wait to see what happens."

Mr. Barron was not exaggerating about the cases he shared that evening. The stories were improbable, implausible, and most of them might seem to be exaggerated burlesques of delirious hallucinations, the effect emphasized by the storm outside, but in a sheer contrast to the calm, sincere, matter-of-fact, and undramatic presentation of them by Mr. Barron.

When I turned in for the night in the bedroom next to the children's room, Caleb tucked me in with a kiss and a short recitation from a Psalm:

> "I will lie down and sleep in peace,
> for thou alone, Oh Lord,
> make me dwell in safety." **(4:8)**

He left and closed the door behind him and returned downstairs to sleep as he had planned on the couch.

With him gone and I now alone, I felt the house trembling with the noisy wind and rain. I thought Mr. Barron's spooky stories would keep me awake, but when I ran over them in my mind, I found something comforting in every one. They didn't have altogether happy endings, but each turned redemptive in some way. The world is dark, scary, unpredictable, mysterious, unknown, and at times appears to bend, even break, the laws of nature, but all in all, it's not as bad as our fears tell us.

Sunday, May 17
Escape to the Sea

My last day with the museum.

When I arrived early, long before opening, a woven basket tied with a red bow waited at the top of the handicapped ramp, a card in an envelope tucked into the side. Dark green, crispy translucent wrap hid the bulgy contents of the basket. I opened the pink and orange card, titled, "Thinking of You" in a fancy, nearly illegible whorly font. Inside, a handwritten note said, "Nice to meet you the other day. Sorry about your troubles. Best of luck! Love, the Elktons," and was signed by Allen, Fannie, and Tim. I could smell the basket's contents before I uncovered them, and sure enough, apples, a greasy paper bag of shelled, roasted filberts, half-pint jars of jam, and a sampler box of home-made fudge.

From nestled in their midst, peered a brown, stuffed Teddy Bear of a vintage style. I cradled the bear in my arms and kissed it on the forehead. I'm sure it was Tim's, because, though clean and cared for, it smelled old, and one of the ears had been expertly re-attached. I wonder if his parents knew it was in the basket.

My plan for the day was to attend the early morning community worship service and then hide in my office the remainder of the day, and with Caleb's help, pack up the rest of my things and take them home. But without explanation, the Festival Committee canceled the service at the last minute, which gave me a little extra time. As I could see from my window and hear, the crowd for the reenactment was growing steadily larger and louder. The hanging ceremony was to commence exactly at noon. Mr.

Barron was setting up with his son to broadcast his radio program live from the gallows.

Caleb arrived at the museum about 11 AM. "I *thought* it was a bad idea for you to attend the worship farce."

"Many of the ministers are sincere."

"Sincerely demented. There are masked animals among the gallows crowd, wearing black and carrying poles with effigies of you hanging by the neck."

"Don't call them animals."

"Humans. Sick humans."

"Bad, but better. They've conceived a connection between George Duniway, their hated Tyrant King, and my advocacy for Duniway's innocence. All the docents and employees called to say they aren't coming in today—they didn't even say they're sick."

"We should leave now."

"I told Beale I'd stay through today."

"Step outside a minute and listen."

I did. The only description I could give to what I heard is a cattle stampede in a western movie with all the lowing, bellowing, and tramping of feet, except the humans were more rhythmical. Involuntary, instinctive fear sent shivers through my body.

"The police are dragging those animals away, but we should leave anyway."

"You're right. Let Beale sue me or dock my pay."

"Let's drop your stuff at your apartment and drive up to the house and get away from this mess."

"It'll be quiet there."

It was quiet. I read and took a nap while Caleb split firewood. Afterwards, we walked up the hill behind the house to enjoy the fine, afternoon spring sky. After we returned to the house, while Caleb showered, the Barrons' rental car and a huge black van roared up the road. Mr. Barron and two new people jumped out, wild-eyed and excited. One or the other of the strangers would laugh suddenly. Only Mrs. Barron maintained her dignified composure, and she took her husband by the arm.

"Sorry, Melinda," he said. "These are my old friends, Atlas and Motty. They—we—have a tale to tell you."

As a reader, you will want to know right now what they said. As the storyteller, I'm making you wait. Three reasons. The first is what they said comprised only a few shocking paragraphs, and, second, Mr. Barron gave me a complete transcript of his program, which he had broadcasted live from the hanging reenactment, and that tells the whole story as it occurred. I will include excerpts from the transcript later in these pages. The third reason is that Mr. Barron said, "We talked about this on the way, and we agreed all of us should leave this afternoon."

"As soon as possible," Atlas said.

"Why?"

"If you thought Saturday was wild, after Atlas and Motty's performance today, Yoncalla is dangerous."

"It will be worse tonight. Especially for you, Miss," Atlas said, "and your man, Caleb. Someone might come to this house."

"Atlas has a special sensitivity to other people's feelings," Motty said.

"Sensitivity is one way of putting it," Mrs. Barron said. "I agree, Yoncalla is unsettled and chaotic, but he's especially tuned to the feelings of his wife, who is arriving at the coast tomorrow."

"Our plan is to leave here for Umpqua Bay as soon as we can pack. I have a friend there, Whelan, who is building a prototype yacht, and it's now serviceable. He's offered to take us out on the water this evening. It's a big boat, so there's room for everyone. I've already spoken with him, and he says we can stay the night."

"Be honest, this boat ride has been your plan for coming to Oregon from the start," Mrs. Barron said.

"Yeah, but the Yoncalla story proved more important."

"The ship on the Pacific Ocean will be our refuge from the storm," Atlas said.

If it didn't derail the story, I'd give a fulsome report of our drive to Umpqua Bay, of meeting Mr. Barron's gracious, thoughtful friend, of the aero-hydrodynamic lines of the gun-blue yacht, the *NinX Caravel!* (which was bigger than it looked from a distance), of its

nearly silent motors, and of the rollicking pace by which it skipped across the wave tops. Everyone was enjoying themselves too much to bother being seasick. Caleb stood front and center outside as far forward as possible, grinning into the punishing gale.

After a while, I climbed the steps to the small room on top where the boat's people were driving.

"How fast are we traveling?" I asked the captain.

"We are holding back for passenger comfort, Miss, but at the moment, 87 knots."

"How fast is that?" I asked and grabbed a shiny brass thingy to steady myself from a lurch.

He frowned, raised his cap, and looked mystified, like he didn't understand the question and didn't wish to be rude. "Provided the boat doesn't catch fire, we'll be in Tillamook Bay within the hour."

"Are we in danger of catching fire, Captain?"

"It's been known to happen. Please, if you will, do not touch the instruments."

The sky that evening performed a rare sample of a sunset, flooding a rack of billowy clouds with fiery splendors, fading into a pink dream that diminished into bold grays and blues. We "dropped anchor" in a calm Tillamook Bay in the dusky dark, and soon afterwards a single French word rhyming with "dared" shot over the water. A hurried scramble to drop the skiff over the side and a frantic race to shore. Every one of us was glancing side to side at the others, searching for answers. Whelan stuck his head in, read the room, laughed, and said, "The chef needed something or other from the grocery. Truffles."

The skiff returned faster than could be believed, followed by two unknown speedboats.

We had little time to wonder because as soon as the chef and his harried skiff pilot had climbed onboard, dinner was served. The remainder of the evening passed serenely: delectable flavors, gentle swells, soft music, good company. Slow dancing led by Atlas and his wife, Mary Sue. Caleb tucked me in as usual, though quickly, because Mrs. Barron, who was to share the cabin, was watching with amusement. He retired to his cabin with Mr. Barron, I suppose. I slept like a baby, slept like a log—slept like a

mud turtle on his sunny log—and woke up with the aroma of toast, eggs, and coffee, under a clear sky outside the windows, and with the sun rising behind the coastal range blanketed by morning fog.

Monday, May 18
An Unexpected Wedding Reception

"You slept in," Caleb said, he standing beside my bed and holding a tray.

I scooted upright on my pillows. Mrs. Barron and her child were gone, their beds neatly made.

"We are back in Umpqua Bay. Cruised all night at a sedate 12 knots under a thin sliver of a moon."

I stretched and motioned for the breakfast tray, which Caleb arranged before me.

"Let me tell you some news. Whelan and I talked through most of the night. After a few more tests today and collecting a few more supplies, he plans a shakedown cruise to Hawaii, leaving tonight. Mr. and Mrs. Barron planned to go, but something came up, and Whelan said we could go in their places if we wanted. But we have to be ready to go today."

My mouth was full of scrambled egg, so I couldn't say what I was thinking.

"I know what you're thinking. Here's my idea. We're planning to get married in November, and the important parts are all arranged."

"Mostly arranged."

"Anyway, we've made a deposit on a venue and sent Save Our Date messages, so that part is settled. And we haven't made plans for a honeymoon, so let's make Hawaii our honeymoon."

"But—"

"Let me finish. I've called around and found a Justice of the Peace in Reedsport who will perform a civil service today."

"But—"

"Let me finish. The Barrons, Whelan, and half his crew will be witnesses."

"But—"

"We can get the marriage license right away and fill out a form, pay an additional $15 and waive the three-day waiting period, and then we can leave for Hawaii. We'll stay there a couple weeks, then fly back, move into our house, and in a few months do the wedding celebration with our friends and relatives."

"But— Aren't you going to interrupt me?"

"I'm finished."

"It's a wonderful idea, Caleb. But I want to go home first and pack for the trip."

"Let me ask Whelan."

By the time I finished breakfast and washed my face, Caleb had returned.

"Atlas said it's not safe to return to Yoncalla, and Whelan said don't worry about packing. The boat has everything we need for the trip, and we can pick up anything else we need when we reach Hawaii. Or do some shopping in Reedsport today."

"That will be expensive."

"Whelan didn't say it overtly, but I think he means to cover our expenses."

"That's uncomfortable."

"It's not like we're begging. Mr. Barron told him about your discovery of the eidetic plane. He might be interested in funding some research."

We talked about this much more, but in the end, I thought the plan would work.

Again, I could write a detailed description and analysis of the civil wedding ceremony—about filling out the paperwork, and the other couples waiting for their turns, and the rest. But I'll keep it short. We were second in line. Other couples and their families arrived for their marriages, some of the girls in fancy dresses and the men in suits, and it was festive in the hallway there, and tense, too.

We, both Caleb and I, anticipated a wedding ceremony at the municipal building as a simple formality, and the "real" marriage ritual would be later, when we put on a party. So, we were surprised when the import of the commitment and the words

we said emerged— I had been running through my mind ahead of time what I wanted to say, and we spoke our vows on the spot.

I don't know how the wedding could have been more meaningful. Sure, we could have had a crowd, and sure, we could have had music and a homily, but the essentials were all present, and our new friends as witnesses. The Justice of the Peace smiled during our vows. She said weddings were the best part of her job.

After the ceremony, we all trooped noisily down the ornate staircase of the municipal building and back out into the salty ocean breeze. Whelan's messenger boy was waiting with a cardboard box, and from it drew and handed out sparkly, golden spinners—whirligigs on sticks—like those made for children's toys or for scaring away birds.

We played with those a while, amazing passersby and seagulls alike, and then posed for pictures. A pair of the passersby, police officers strolling along, did not seem impressed, and as soon as we transitioned into leaving, they stepped forward.

"Are you Melinda Coe Waldo?"

"And are you Caleb Stephen Meeks?"

"We are arresting you under suspicion of the murder of Danford Beale."

Shock and disbelief!

One of them muttered some jingle about rights and silence as they handcuffed each of us behind our backs and loaded me into the back of a police car parked nearby. As Caleb was being loaded into another police car, he yelled, "It'll be okay! Love you, my bride! See you soon!" and I started screaming and crying.

I was scared and confused, and began to pray. As we drove along sedately, as far as I could tell, we were returning to the still dangerous Yoncalla, but I kept thinking of the remembered glimpse I had caught of our wedding guests watching during the arrest: Silent, cold, and grim.

You're probably in a fidget to find out what happened next, and I don't blame you, and you could skip ahead and read, but you've also been waiting to hear what outrageous things happened at the

hanging reenactment that stirred up and angered so many, and as far as you know, explains how Danford Beale died, if indeed, he did die, because you can't be sure of that either, and we weren't either at the time.

Transcript of Strange Days Radio, the Broadcast of Sunday, May 17 (edited)

STANDARD INTRODUCTION AND THEME MUSIC

<CROWD NOISE>

JT BARRON The sounds you've been hearing are voices from the town square in Yoncalla, Oregon. We are here, live, at the final day of the annual Duniway Festival. I'm moving through the throngs with my son, Scotty, beside me to film and troubleshoot. Scotty says, Hi! The Festival, in most respects, is like any other small city celebration with music, craft vendors, food, jovial crowds, and a tie-in with local history or some feature about the town. Why I am here, and you with me, is because the theme this week in Yoncalla celebrates a murder and a hanging. Overall, the scene presently is like a circus, but louder.

[Cut: The already known highlights of the backstory]

JT BARRON And we are poised to witness a re-enactment of the hangings of 1865.

I normally like to interview attendees of exotic events, but I personally find the hanging theme distasteful, and can't bear to hear stupid, ignorant, or callous people gush on. I don't want to give them a platform, so I'll let you hear my objective—or not so objective—descriptions.

On my right is the temporary platform from which the scaffolds arise, two of them. The ropes with their nooses. They are like loading cranes at the seaport, only small. Behind the gallows platform stands the courthouse with its tall, spire-like tower. In front of me is a kind of orchestra pit where people are gathering, on their feet and packing in tight for the close-up view.

To my left, stretches a long sloping hill, mostly clear of trees. People have brought their picnic lunches and are sitting on blankets spread out on the grass. The weather is warm, and not hot. Metallic bleachers that had been facing the platform, which had served as a performance stage earlier, are now on the side facing the grassy middle.

Let's walk away from the gallows into the crowd of spectators. I'd guess all together… 30,000 people in attendance, including children. This group before me looks like a Sunday School class.

<SOUNDS OF CROWD NOISE AND SHOUTING>

Men in makeshift pioneer costumes are hawking a little pamphlet. Let me see that, please: The Confessions of George Duniway and William Cain.

Voice in the Background: 10 dollars. For the museum. We accept all major credit cards.

JT Barron No, thank you. Here. Take it back.

Yes, I'm now about a hundred yards away and can see the scaffolds from here. Hmmm. I also see snipers on the rooftops. I assume they are LEOs. That's reassuring, if I may be sarcastic.

Now making our way back closer.

Who are you? Get out of my way. Won't move? I don't think you've done an accurate assessment of the risks you're taking. Bad idea. Get out of my way! MOVE! GET BACK!

Hold this, son.

<SOUNDS OF SLAPPING, GRUNTING, & CRIES OF PAIN. CURSING. THUDS OF HEAVY OBJECTS HITTING THE GROUND. YELLING AND LOUD TALKING (edited)**>**

JT BARRON Give me a second to catch my breath. Sorry about that, everyone. As Scotty and I wove through the crowd, a wall of skinny, black-clad thugs formed in front of us. Then they closed in behind us, too, so we were encircled. Eight of them. They moved in and began grabbing at us and our equipment. Let's say, I was not pleased, and I made them move.

SCOTTY Super cool, Dad!

JT BARRON <LAUGHING> A few spectators helped.

We're continuing our journey toward the scaffold. What's this? Another black enclosure. Didn't you see what happened to

your friends? <SIGH> Okay, okay. We're leaving. Make a path, or I'll make one.

<LONG STRETCH OF BACKGROUND CROWD SOUND & BREATHING>

[EIGHT SECONDS OF DEAD AIR FOLLOWED BY STRANGE DAYS THEME MUSIC]

PRODUCER SOPHIA Hello. I'm Jonathan's in-studio producer at our secret underground bunker in North Carolina. Ha, ha. He asked me to explain that he's moving to a new vantage point to cover the reenactment. In the meantime, I'm supposed to read to you a list of executions in the State of Oregon between 1815 and 1930. It looks pretty sterile and straightforward, so I can get through it, but it tells a lot of history. Before I start, however, I must say that while Oregon has a death penalty on the books, governors of the state have imposed moratoriums on the practice since 2011. Here goes… [Reads from the list. Name, Age, Race, Sex, Occupation, Crime, Method of Execution, Date, County]

JT BARRON Okay, I'm back. We are now high up on the courthouse tower with a perfect crow's nest view. Law enforcement wouldn't have let us up here, but they had been watching our little scuffle below and thought it hysterically funny.

The crowd has grown even larger now than I estimated. People are streaming in. It's a little frightening. We arrived just in time. Wait. What's this? Let me listen… That's a commercial for a landscaping business offering a Duniway Festival Discount… Some official-looking persons are now pacing up and down on the platform, wearing 1860s costumes. I can hear a solo bugle fanfare. Now the condemned men are being led along from the jail by a military escort past the courthouse and then up the steps. One of them, the portly George Duniway, is marching proudly, the other, William Cain, is struggling, dragging his feet, as three guards have him firmly in their grip… They are now in place.

The Judge on Loudspeaker: "Do you have any last words before you enter Eternity?"

Cain leans forward and spits at the crowd. "I'm innocent! Damn you all to Hell!"

CROWD Boooo! HANG HIM! <LAUGHTER>

JT BARRON Duniway asks to read a passage: "My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

He then throws the book out to the crowd, crying: "Now take this book and follow its teachings!"

Cowboy sheriff deputies are now pulling black bags over the condemned heads.

Cain's knees buckle, and deputies prop him up. They slip the nooses around their necks and step away from Duniway, but they are propping up Cain.

Some invisible signal is given, and the floor drops away from beneath their feet with a shockingly loud, hollow rattle that echoes off the buildings.

CROWD Ooooooooooooooo!

JT BARRON Oh no. What's happened? Oh no. The platform has collapsed—it's fallen into a ruin—leaving the hanged men visible. Cain has freed his hands and is clawing at the noose. His legs are kicking the air. He's gasping for breath. Okay. I can't tell you what I'm seeing now. It's too bad to describe. But the other man. Duniway. Oh, no. He's. His body is on the ground. Oh, no. He's been decapitated. The rope. Blood.

<HORRIFIED CROWD NOISE>

JT BARRON You may hear: the crowd is moaning and wailing. Some are vomiting. Some have fainted dead away. Women are screaming. You probably can hear them. The crowd as a body has surged away in every direction. Men have rushed up to free the struggling man, but the knot is too tight. There's a pocket knife, but it's not effective. His body has grown still. Police have surrounded the scene and pushed everyone away. An ambulance is arriving, lights flashing. Police on a megaphone.

You know what? Something is wrong. Too many things are wrong. Yoncalla has been enacting this hanging for years. They use the same local actors. They wear harnesses. I've watched past videos, and it's made hammy, melodramatic, and

sanitary. After the floor falls away, the actors free themselves, step forward and take a bow. But here. Too many failures to be real.

Hang on a moment. Let me—

<SOUND OF PHONE DIALING, IT STOPS>

JT BARRON Hello? Hello? Anyone there?

VOICE ON SPEAKERPHONE Oh, Jonathan! Didn't recognize your number. Hey. Nice to hear from you. What a surprise! Been a while. What's going on?

<SOUND OF THE POLICE MEGAPHONE, REPEATED ON THE TELEPHONE WORD FOR WORD TWO SECONDS DELAYED>

JT BARRON That's all I needed to hear. I'm on the air. We'll be talking with you in a few minutes, I'm sure. I'm disconnecting now.

Well, friends. The botched hanging enactment we witnessed was a hoax, and with the best of intentions, I'm sure. Sometimes in our investigations, we uncover hoaxes perpetrated for any sorts of reason. This one was designed to horrify people so much that they'd never allow another festival enactment of the hanging. Soon, as soon as it's discovered by others, rumors will fly as to who is behind the hoax. You know me well enough that you're confident it's something I would never condone, let alone perpetrate. I can say with confidence that nobody will ever find out who did it. They are people who will leave no trace of evidence. Certainly, I won't be snitching.

That's all for our program today. Consider it part one of a case I'm calling "Through the Eidetic Plane." Because I have another, a true tale to share with you from Yoncalla, Oregon, one that brought me here in the first place. And it's all connected to what we've just seen and heard. I'll be back.

END of TRANSCRIPT

It's Melina Waldo back on the thread of my saga: Now, I can share with you the story Atlas told us later in the day, right before we left for the Umpqua Bay. It's not long.

Atlas heard about Jonathan's involvement with the Duniway Festival—don't ask me how, I don't know—and decided to help. He brought in some friends of his who had just wrapped up filming a movie in British Columbia. He convinced the long-standing volunteer re-enactors that they were needed as extras in the Ashland Shakespeare Festival for the weekend, and set up the elaborately executed hoax, including replacing the paramedics. Jonathan was not happy—said that it might destroy his credibility.

"You exposed it as a hoax on your show while the reenactment was still in progress," Motty said that afternoon. "If anything, it will enhance your reputation. Besides, you adapt to anything, I mean every thing."

"I try, but it's not as easy as it looks. The normal, natural, explainable aberrations are harder than the paranormal ones. I'm more worried now about how it will affect Melinda."

"Did you have to be so rough on my guys?" Motty said.

"Those were your thugs?"

"We replaced the Aunties. We were afraid if you got close to the stage, you'd see through the charade."

"I'm not sure 'aberration' is a compliment," Atlas said, sulking. "Hanging people during a festival is an aberration."

"Sorry," Mr. Barron said. "I mean it as a compliment. You pulled the thing off brilliantly. The best illusionist performance in my entire life." He shuddered while laughing a little. "It was too real. And the audience—they weren't expecting—" and here his mirth got the better of him for a second. "But then this is serious. The reaction of the crowd was shock, and then anger about being subjected to such horror. Wait until they find out it was a hoax."

Caleb, who had been sitting in his pickup and looking at his phone, called out to us, "They found out. Emergency Alerts say there's rioting in Yoncalla. Broken windows and burning cars.

"Well, if true, the reaction is more intense than I thought it'd be. We talked about this on the way here, and we think all of us should leave this afternoon."

Later on Monday, May 18

Our Mystery Solved

Back to my arrest narration: Once we reached the courthouse in Yoncalla—the second such judicial building we'd visited that day, and were led through a scary little mob of shouting protestors, they read me the murder charge, photographed and fingerprinted me, and booked me into the jail. Caleb and I weren't allowed to see each other, so it was lonely. Nothing to read. I simply sat in my private cell, with my hands folded in my lap, stunned, and wondering what had happened. How was Caleb doing? Nobody told me anything. Not even the useless public defender they had assigned to me. They took me to a room, and two detectives asked me endless questions, some of them threatening, some tricky, designed to engender trust—entreats for me to confess and betray Caleb. I said nothing to them. Not a thing. Back in my cell, the night stretched on endlessly as I prayed, "Jesus help me" over and over. If I slept, it was only for seconds at a time.

Even before breakfast, Isobel Barron appeared outside my cell. I've never seen anyone with such contrasting facets to her personality. To the guards, she was quietly commanding. She did not raise her voice, but they were afraid of her as they unlocked the door; to me she turned a sweet, motherly smile and said, "I can't imagine how hard your night was. Everything is okay."

At this, I broke into hysterical sobbing.

She embraced me in a hug and said soothingly, "We sent messages, but I see you didn't receive them."

She led me out of the jailhouse and through the indoor public area. Heads swiveled toward us, and silence followed as we walked along. On the steps outside waited a small crowd of smiles and teary eyes. Caleb took me in his arms. After all this, Mr. Barron said, "There was never any question of your and Caleb's innocence, but it took some explaining to convince the cops."

Some press photographers lurked in the shadows.

It took some explaining to me, too, of how we ended up being charged and let out so quickly.

"These are the known facts," Mr. Barron said as we drove out to our house, Caleb and I sitting side-by-side in the back, "as much as law enforcement would give to the public: Danford Beale's body was found at the Rocky Cliff Overlook up on Drain Mountain Road. He had been killed with a single pistol shot through the heart on Sunday night. Beale had called 911 from the overlook earlier in the evening and reported he had been tasered by three unknown assailants, and his 1950s Mercedes had been stolen. When police arrived, they found him deceased. Early the following morning, an anonymous tip reported that his car was parked in front of your apartment, Melinda. The police were suspicious of the caller and were able to identify his voice via the recording. I won't suggest that Whelan had anything to do with tracking him down. The tipster was Sidney Smith, who said he just happened to drive by your place. Responding to the police questions, he told them all about how you hated Beale for the festival, for firing you, for all the things he said about you in the press, and that you had expressed fantasies about you and Caleb robbing his car because of your financial stress.

"And the police kept coming back, Melinda, to what you said about historians being dangerous."

"But—"

"It was a simple matter for us to prove neither of you could have been anywhere near the overlook, and you were in fact some 180 miles away in Tillamook Bay. Whelan keeps precise records of his yacht's geolocation minute by minute—and we will not mention that he had photographs of his boat from some Department of War satellites.

"Then there were the paparazzi photos."

"What paparazzi photos?"

"Remember the little speedboats that followed the chef when he was returning from the grocery in Tillamook? You and Caleb are in those photos, ones published this very morning in "The Portlandia Life."

"Photographs, huh?"

"The police have arrested Sidney Smith and charged him now with murder in addition to robbery. He's in jail right now. The police think he will give up two other suspects."

"Oh, my gosh!" I exclaimed, then sighed. "Did your friend Whelan leave last night? Did we miss out?"

"He has a firm appointment in Hawaii, and no telling what might go wrong on the voyage. He had no margin for waiting."

"That's disappointing."

"Atlas and Mary Sue took your place."

"But there's something better," Caleb said, excited. "Here's a note from him Mr. Barron gave me."

> Dear Friends, Sorry to leave you behind. I wish I could wait and help you here in your plight. I'll see what I can do from the boat. It might be better that you missed the departure, however, because we may have issues on the way, and there's not much to see between here and Hawaii. But I've secured plane tickets for you to fly out when you're ready. This is my wedding present. You can join us when we cruise among the islands. Unless you fancy rough seas and endless blue water, and the possibility of the motors failing, this will be the better part of the expedition.

"Let's go now," I said, with immense joy and relief when we arrived at our house, and it hadn't been vandalized.

"It will take them several days to cross."

"Okay. Let's take our time, pack our own things, and save some money. Shall I stay here in the meantime? I'm never sleeping in my apartment again. It's not safe."

"We're married, remember?"

"Ohhhhhhh!!!"

"The Barrons are leaving as soon as they can today, so our house is all ours."

I napped through much of the day, and that night, as usual, Caleb tucked me into bed, and this time he didn't leave.

May 27-October 16
Spring, Summer, Fall

Hawaii was as wonderful as you can imagine. We flew into Honolulu, arriving four days before Whelan's *NinX Caravel*. After they completed repairs and maintenance on the boat, we stepped onboard. From here on, we all avoided touristy places and sought out-of-the-way beauty, including waterfalls that poured straight into ocean bays. The only time we touched land was on isolated beaches and on our overnight burro trek to the summit of the newly awakened Mauna Loa to watch the tumbling, rowdy, flaming geysers of lava and columns of smoke, a spectacle from Earth's passionate heart, too hot to face more than a few seconds at a time.

Yoncalla did not exist until we landed back in Portland a month later, and grudgingly sped south on I-5, our minds and hearts flush with the joy of another world that we left only in body.

Caleb folded back into his construction work, and I, now unemployed for the first time in years, soon realized that making a home for a husband was fun and fulfilling. The days passed one after another, and each moment filled us with meaning, pleasure, and significance. From a sense of misguided duty, I completed museum job applications and sent in resumes, but without emotional investment in the results. Caleb's job was hard, if financially rewarding, and the commute to and from the coast tedious, but I set my purpose to wipe all his burden away the moment he arrived home.

The morning of spring warmed into the midday of summer; summer aged into the golden evening of autumn.

Yoncalla had settled back into a sane, normal town, and the drama and nonsense of the Festival no longer mattered. Not a whisper of bringing it back next year. Now and then, I caught a headline about the upcoming trial of Sidney Smith, and I paid little attention. Fortunately, neither Caleb nor I needed to testify. In the beginning of October, about two weeks before the trial was to commence, Mr. Barron wrote and said he had been following the

news and was uneasy. He thought pieces of the story were missing. He also wanted to do another broadcast, Part Two.

"My friend Atlas might give us some answers about how Beale was killed. Sidney Smith and cohorts are pleading Not Guilty, but if they are guilty, we might find evidence to strengthen the case. I had hoped Atlas would be available earlier, but, as you know, he and Mary Sue shipped off to Hawaii without notice and stayed, and then he went east to see his uncle.* I want to visit some friends near Portland, and we plan to return to Yoncalla and look into some things. We invite you to join us. We need you."

I loathed thinking about the murder, but Caleb said we should help.

*Learn more about his uncle in the story beginning on page 113.

Saturday, October 10
Rocky Cliff Overlook

So, Mr. Barron arranged for us to ride up together to the overlook, the site of the alleged murder, on a night of the weekend prior to the trial. Atlas, Jonathan and Isobel—the children are with Caleb's parents and Mary Sue, though Scotty protested—and Motty and one of his buddies. Caleb and I. Seven of us. We rode up together in Caleb's musical truck. It was cozy. We packed in like teenagers. An absurdity of economy.

The evening was lovely. The sun was setting behind us over the Coastal Range in the west, and filtered sunrays flamed over our heads. On a perfectly clear day from the overlook, a person could see the Three Sisters mountains in the Northeast, but this evening it was obscured by a few clouds on the horizon that caught and held the golden-red rays.

We got out of the truck and gathered at the single picnic table, which needed a coat of paint. One other car, an older SUV, was there. We hoped they would leave; and soon, as it grew dark, they drove further up the road.

Quiet talking. The air grew chill, and Caleb got me my jacket from the truck and handed out flashlights. Atlas at last scooted off the bench and said, "I'm ready."

"I've studied the photos of the crime scene, and the detective's notes, and Beale's vintage car was parked here. Wait. Keep it simple. Let me walk around and tell you what I'm reading. I might take some time, so be patient. You can follow me around. Don't expect me to be excited and emotional.

"Beale parked his car right here, as I said. A single car was here when he arrived, but they left immediately, and a minute later, another car pulled up. They had been following him, but he didn't know it. He was frustrated because his plan counted on no one being here. The people—there were three, all men. Sidney Smith in disguise, as we already suspect, but the other two were recent Mexican hires of Beale in his landscape construction business. I don't know their names.

"One of the landscape guys circled around Beale's car in admiration and asked if he could take a picture. Beale, as always, was proud of his acquisition and said, of course. The photographer took several images from different angles and distances—to capture detail. Beale followed him, narrating specs about the car, but the photographer wasn't paying much attention. Finally, the photographer asked Beale if he would pose with the car."

"No!" Mr. Barron blurted.

"Yes. When Beale was distracted, Smith stunned him with a taser, and Beale went down. He crumpled to the ground. The men pulled his limp body to the grassy place, right there. And boosted, I should say, *stole* the car and left him behind."

Atlas paused a few moments, staring around at the ground.

"Okay, the robbers never intended to kill Beale. They didn't kill him." Atlas studied Mr. Barron for a few moments. "Not directly, but they carried an instrument used to kill him."

Caleb: "How do you know?"

"Umm. Before Smith drove away with the Mercedes, he tossed Beale's bag out the door. In fact, he… he set it down gently beside him. Beale's phone was in the bag, but critically, the old revolver and the original 161-year-old photograph of N. Balch."

"No!" Mr. Barron said.

"Yes."

Barron: "I know what happened next."

Atas: “Beale called 911. And then he brought out the revolver and the photograph, put the photo on the ground, knelt on one knee, and shot the photograph.”

Barron: “And he died.”

Atas: “He died, indeed. He was shot.”

Barron: “But not from the revolver he wielded.”

Atlas: “No. Wait. There’s more.”

Atlas blinked several times in rapid succession, closed his eyes, and shook his head. He opened them and then blew out a puff of breath, like people do reflectively when they experience something difficult or when a hard thought crosses their mind.

“It’s a burden. My sight. I don’t know if other people have this problem, but being me is exhausting. I know his final thought as he was pulling the trigger. He was thinking he would burn the photograph after he shot it, and then he regretted letting the ‘car aficionados’ take his picture, and as he was in the motion of pulling the trigger, he thought, ‘This is a mistake.’”

We were all in shock as we contemplated Beale’s last moment in this world.

“He died at the exact moment he pulled the trigger,” Mr. Barron said. “Not sure why, but it’s related to the Eidetic Plane.”

We were all silent as we wondered how this happened.

“As bad as Sidney Smith was,” I said at last, “he wasn’t a murderer.”

“He tried to frame us for murder,” Caleb said. “He should receive the same punishment he tried to inflict on us.”

“Maybe. But if we know something to clear him of guilt, shouldn’t we tell the police?”

Caleb: “Psychic crap would never be allowed in court.”

“How does Atlas know all this?” I asked.

“He used to work as a human bloodhound,” Mr. Barron said. “He never testified for a trial, but he provided law enforcement information that led them to admissible evidence.”

Atlas: “I built enough credibility that reputable police guys *could* have vouched for me.”

“But any half-witted defense attorney would eat you alive.” This was Caleb, again.

Altas: “Right, oh! He would.”

After this, we seemed to be done, and everyone began edging toward the truck.

"Wait," Atlas said. "Does anyone have a grocery bag?"

Caleb produced a bag, and another, stronger flashlight that would blind the Man in the Moon, and Atlas began picking up the stray empty beer cans and whatnot—fast-food trash—that unconscious scenic viewers had discarded onto the ground.

Caleb: "You realize detectives scoured the site?"

"Of course. But I hate litter with a passion. This stuff is new. Wait!" He bent over, snatched up a bottle, and examined it closely in the light. Smelled the top. "The car that was here when we arrived. Which way did they go?"

"Further up the road," Caleb said. "It dead-ends."

"We need to talk with them."

Caleb drove us with only his parking lights on, enough to see the road, but not so bright as to spook whoever it was up there. We rounded a turn, and he flicked on his ultra-bright spotlights. Two people, a girl and a guy, were sitting on the tailgate, smoking something. Exposed and frightened, they left the hatchback open and scrambled into the SUV to flee, but Caleb had turned sideways in the road and blocked them.

Mr. Barron walked over to the driver's side window, which was open. (He's fearless). "Hey guys, we won't blab to anyone about your secret, whatever it is, but we need to talk with you."

Caleb, who had followed Mr. Barron and stood behind him with his hand in his pocket just in case, said, "Thomas and Rhoda Ann. We won't tell, but if your Grandpa Sidney, your Grand-uncle Sidney, finds out, you'll both be in serious danger."

The others in our group had followed Caleb.

"We're just friends," the girl said.

"You're not just friends," Mrs. Barron said. "You're sweethearts. How old are you?"

"We can legally marry," she retorted. "I'm 18."

"She's 17," Atlas said

"How do you know, smarty?"

"You can't kid a kidder."

"Oh… Please don't tell anyone. If they find out, we'll drive off Rocky Cliff."

The upshot of that episode is that after talking privately with Mrs. Barron, the girl and the young man—he considerably reluctant, but going along—agreed to tell the police detective what they saw and heard on the night of the death.

They had driven to the overlook, "to play," Rhoda Ann said, and they heard Beale and his car coming "a mile off." "Everybody knows that awesome car. We were busy, so we didn't run right away. As soon as he arrived, we scooted up the hill, hoping he wouldn't go so far. It was quiet for about 20 minutes. Then we heard the car fire up, like a spastic machine gun. Then it got quieter and quieter driving down the mountain. Another 20 minutes later, we heard the gunshot. We didn't know what to do then, and we waited more. Then started back. It was dark, so we didn't see anything at the overlook. As we drove down, we met the ambulance and police blue lights racing up, strobing and wailing like who knows what. We later heard what happened, and we're scared to say anything. If Uncle Sidney was guilty of stealing that car, he couldn't have shot Mr. Beale, right?"

"Grandpa Sidney was never nice to any of us," the young man said, "so why should we do him a favor? He's only going to hate us more, or worse, because of our—you know what I mean—horsing around."

I might as well wrap up their family story now.

Sidney Smith had been mortally afraid of someone killing him in revenge for the supposed killing of Beale, and the mercy showed him from his young relatives touched a well-buried tender place in his heart, so, apparently, he forgave the young, misguided lovers, as did the rest of the Smith clan and the town, because the gossip in the community died finally and forever, and this saved the lovers from driving off the cliff at the overlook.

October 17 & Onward

Strange Days Radio, Transcript. Yoncalla, Part Two

With Danford Beale dead, Sidney Smith in jail, and the board of the museum paralyzed by uncertainty and perhaps shame, no one had acted on my resignation during all that time since May, nor had my contract been nullified. The Assistant Director, Alice, informally, timidly, had stepped up as interim. This twilight zone allowed us to arrange for the radio program to be conducted in the museum after hours. I wanted to use the formal sitting room, but Mr. Barron insisted the storage warehouse with all the files, "surrounded by the documents and artifacts" would be better as to atmosphere and acoustics. When I told him it was not possible for many reasons, we settled on the workspace in the basement.

Keep in mind that the transcript below is heavily edited. We've omitted practically all the ground I've already covered, which would only be repetitive for you, the reader.

Reminder: Mrs. Meeks is me.

MR BARRON Let's begin this week's program with a quote from Mark Twain, whose real—

MRS MEEKS Samuel Langhorne Clemons.

MR BARRON I was jus— Of course. Clemons wrote:

> "We marvel to see what daring chances truth may freely take in constructing a tale, as compared with the poor little conservative risks permitted to fiction. The fiction artist could achieve no success with the materials of a splendid romance. He would have to drop out the chief characters; the public would say such people are impossible. He would have to drop out a number of the most picturesque incidents; the public would say such things could never happen." -Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World.

And thus, we bring you our romance today.

MRS MEEKS Clemons also wrote in the same book: "It is my belief that nearly any invented quotation, played with confidence, stands a good chance to deceive."

MR BARRON I can show you wh— Never mind. Never—

ISOBEL Sorry for breaking in, but where's Lucy?

MR BARRON She was playing quietly with kitchen utensils on the floor a minute ago.

ISOBEL I stepped outside for a phone call. She's gone.

MR BARRON She probably just wandered off. Scotty's upstairs. I'm sure she's fine.

ISOBEL What's this? How did she get this picture? Oh, no! No, no, no! It's her. *She's been pulled into the photograph!* She's smiling at me from the photograph!

MR BARRON Let me see… It looks like her.

ISOBEL I've seen this picture before. She was not in there before. She's been pulled through!

<VOICES CALLING "LUCY">

ISOBEL'S VOICE DISTRAUGHT IN NEAR PANIC

[DEAD AIR]

SOPHIA This is producer Sophia in my North Carolina bunker. I'm not sure what's happening there, but I'm sure it will work out. Meanwhile, I'll play some calming music. Jonathan will be back as soon as the crisis is over. Any time now.

[MUSIC]

MR BARRON All's well. Lucy is fine. We found her sitting in a crib upstairs, playing with a collection of antique dolls. Our son Scotty was exploring the museum and was more or less keeping an eye on her. I don't want to elaborate right now, but my wife went through a traumatic incident years ago—well, we both did—with our son Scotty when he was Lucy's age. She's embarrassed she overreacted a few minutes ago. There happened to be a similar photo on the work table, but without the girl.

MRS MEEKS Understandable. But what if Lucy really had been pulled into the photograph?

MR BARRON I'd have followed and brought her back.

[EDIT]

MR BARRON The District Attorney agreed to drop the murder charges against Sidney Smith and the landscape employees, but, as was right, continued to pursue a robbery trial. Smith signed onto a plea agreement that might let him out of jail before he died of old age. The other defendants went to trial. They tried to say Smith told them they were taking the car to a repair shop. But even their own lawyers undermined this claim.

MRS MEEKS I didn't follow the trial as it occurred, but the defendants' attorneys brought out that Beale had sponsored dozens of migrants into the United States to work in his company, but only as they agreed to serve for three years at substandard wages and live in his ramshackle housing, and he paid in scrip that they could only spend in his stores.

MR BARRON Indentured servitude, which might have escaped notice, except at the end of the three years, he refused to release them from the obligation, and threatened to send them back to their home country. The two defendants thought they could smuggle Beale's Mercedes into Mexico and sell it for a fortune. These high-dollar cars are bought and sold as investments.

MRS MEEKS But Sidney Smith never explained his motivation. We don't know much about him.

MR BARRON You've avoided involvement in the trial—

MRS MEEKS I wish I could forget it all.

MR BARRON Forgetting might require resolving more of the hard questions and putting them to rest.

MRS MEEKS Okay. Okay. What do you have in mind?

MR BARRON The ballistics testing on the bullet that killed Beale. The report said it passed through him and was recovered from the body of his car. Shall I say more?

MRS MEEKS Go ahead.

MR BARRON This was not in the report and will never be made public, except by me: The bullet was made from a magnetic, radioactive rare-earth metal. It wasn't a bullet as such because it

had not been attached to a shell casing and bore no traces of gunpowder. It was more of a pellet, like from a pneumatic rifle.

MRS MEEKS What does that mean?

MR BARRON The pellet is not made today. It even carried a microchip that served a guidance system.

MRS MEEKS It came from the past?

MR BARRON It came from the future.

[Mr. Barron here allowed a few seconds for that to sink in, but noticing it wasn't happening so soon in my case, he continued.]

MR BARRON Here's another piece of the puzzle: Motty, as my audience knows, only works for me part-time as a producer. He's right here in the room with us.

MOTTY Hey, y'all.

MR BARRON Presently, I have Sophia who is in North Carolina, helping me.

SOPHIA How's it going, everybody?!

MR BARRON That's her. She's outstanding. Motty agreed to fill in here at the museum as caretaker until the museum can hire someone full-time. He's handy with a hammer and saw, and *rope*, as well as media equipment.

MRS MEEKS Taking Sidney Smith's place.

MR BARRON All right. Let's focus. He found these, hidden all over the building.

MRS MEEKS Cameras.

MR BARRON In all the rooms.

MRS MEEKS We bought them for keeping an eye on the displays during the Festival. Sidney Smith never installed them.

MR BARRON He did, though. But they were hidden in your office. Three cameras. And in this workroom. Right up there on the top shelf. Equipped with microphones.

MRS MEEKS Spying on me! Let me see it. **<Sound of camera clunking on the table>** Just as I thought. Grapevine. The company that made this is called Grapevine. Grapevine.

MR BARRON It's a line of security hardware and service. Speculation: Sidney Smith placed the cameras on behalf of Beale who, as we know, invested wealth into the festival and

received much more in return. Your discovery of the Eidetic Plane worried him, and since the 1865 murder case had collapsed, he, perhaps on a whim, thought he would try to cross that plane with a bullet to be sure the murder occurred. What happened then was, as he shot and killed an Exemplar of himself in the past, an Exemplar of the future shot and killed him. In a way, he committed suicide.

The .44 mag and future-made projectiles, with all their concentrated energy, were able to achieve an escape velocity.

SOPHIA I think you need to explain your idea of how people are created on a pattern or template that's repeated throughout history. I get it, but—

MR BARRON Sophia, are we on a seven-second delay?

SOPHIA Melinda doesn't need a curse-word minder.

MR. BARRON But I do. Anyway, a number of terms relate to the phenomenon. Doppelganger, simulacrum, and others. But they carry negative connotations and are too limited. So, I came up with calling them Exemplars. Better to err on the positive side. There's even a company that uses a worldwide search to match you with your far-flung "twins," so to speak.

[What followed is a detailed explanation of how we connect to the past through photographs, and beyond that, how I found living "exemplars" of my long since deceased relatives. That took time.]

MR BARRON I've seen those people. It's uncanny.

MRS MEEKS My family community, except for my husband and his people, are almost all in the photographs, and nowhere else in my life. They are people who I knew as a child and wish I could visit them, and they are gone out of reach. But because of my historical work, I'm not so alone anymore. I won't share who those living exemplar relatives are, their current ages, or where they live, but it's been a deep comfort to me to get to know those people who are so important and so dear.

MR BARRON For now, they are all you have.

MRS MEEKS What about your family, Mr. Barron?

MR BARRON I don't have an extensive collection of photos like you. I don't have any photos, in fact. Like you, I have friends, my spouse, and her family. We also have our children.

MRS MEEKS No other living relatives, then?

MR BARRON None living I know about. Melinda, Mrs. Meeks, and I talked about this once when we first met. My family are reclusive in the extreme. I've been out of touch.

MRS MEEKS You could have family members nearby, and you wouldn't know.

MR BARRON They would have aged since I've seen them. What's your purpose here? Why the questions?

MRS MEEKS I won't keep you guessing. I'm your cousin, on your mother's side.

<Silence>
<Sniffing>

MR BARRON My voice is— I knew it! I unconsciously knew we're related!

MRS MEEKS Remember, you hugged me when we met?

MR BARRON Out of character, I know.

MRS MEEKS But not for a cousin you just met for the first time. I didn't recognize who you were until I looked into your background. My parents always said there's some family kook who snoops around into other people's private, personal business and has cockamamie ideas. The black sheep.

MR BARRON <Laughing> Yep, that's me.

MRS MEEKS I'm a black sheep, too. Like you and unlike most of our blood kin, I interact with real people. Ordinary people. I hope nobody takes that the wrong way. Ordinary is extraordinary.

MR BARRON I feel the same way. Ordinary and normal are exceptional and dangerous.

MRS MEEKS Like historians. May I give you a hug?

<THEME MUSIC, ETC.>

That's the end of the transcript. Mr. Barron could speak no more, anyway; and he didn't try.

Epilogue

An epilogue is a condensed catch-all for stray, but enlightening details about what follows after the body of a story. They must be brief, otherwise we'd be trespassing onto novel-length land.

Here goes:

After the program, Mr. Barron and I talked more about our family. I started calling him Cousin Jonny, and the kids, Cousins Scotty and Lucy, but he asked me to leave off the "cousin" titles.

"My parents and everyone cut me off years ago when I struck out on my own," Jonny said. "We had moved around so much as I was growing up that there was no place to return, other than my grandfather's cabin in North Carolina, so when I drove away from home that last time to go into basic training, I never saw anyone again, ever. That's painful."

"He was my grandfather, too. You had the cabin."

"You should come visit us, you and Caleb. It's your cabin as much as mine."

"We will!"

"I learned to be emotionally independent. The military became my family."

"Did you ever try to find us? I mean, you have incredible research capabilities. Add to them curiosity and daring."

"Who do you think gave me all this?"

"You're saying that those who uncover deep secrets know how to hide them?"

"I knew better than to try to find my people."

"Mine gave me an aptitude for historical research, but they shunned me when I took the job at the museum; it was less than a year ago. Once, I went back to visit the estate in California where I grew up, and it had been sold."

The Eidetic Plane episode became the most listened to of all Jonny's programs to date. But a strange thing happened to it. He

had posted the whole program to his website, but the parts when we discussed our family always vanished. Motty kept reposting the whole, but a few seconds following the upload's completion, the website winked off and on, and our discussion was gone. Neatly cut out. Jonny ran all the cleaning software known to man and space aliens, nothing worked, and he gave up. It remains to be seen what happens to this story once it's published in a book.

"At least I know they're out there and thinking about me," Jonny said. "It's like a greeting card."

There's not much left to tell. Half the Board members of the museum resigned within a month or two of the conclusion of Smith's legal proceedings and our second radio program. Dr. Applegate came back to the board and added a couple of new people. And to my astonishment, the Board invited me to join and become the new Chairman!

I accepted!

But by then, I had also received an offer to teach history at Yoncalla High School (starting as soon as January, if I wanted). Just history, no sports coaching or study halls. Three classes a day. No extra duties. The principal said that the students have been clamoring for me to come, and they want the festival to return next year, but without the hangings.

Caleb said I can do both jobs, as school is only 9 months of the year, and the board chairman is only a figurehead.

"What about babies, sir?"

"You're like your cousin; you can do everything."

My husband exaggerates for sure. It would be hard to juggle, but possibly teaching, overseeing a history museum, and raising babies is one and all the same. And I don't want to be over-maudlin here at the end, but I look forward to having Timmy as one of my students someday.

One last note: I'm not 100% sure, but I think my mother appeared at our wedding celebration in November, accompanied by a handsome gentleman who was wearing an impeccably tailored suit with a waistcoat. By the time I broke free to speak with them, they had vanished.

END OF STORY

Story Historical Timeline

Nathanial Balch and William Cain arrive by wagon train, April 1843

Oregon Territory Provisional Government abolishes slavery, July 1843

The California Gold Rush begins, January 24, 1848

George Duniway arrives by wagon train, January 1851

Oregon becomes the 33rd state, February 1859

Birth of Allen J. Dear, Missouri, September 1860

Confederate forces attack the Union-held Fort Sumter, April 1861

Birth of Fannie Amanda (Vail/Vale) Dear, Oregon, June 17, 1863

Henry Failing elected Mayor of Portland, November 1864

Sherman takes Savannah, December 1864

Murder of Nathanial Balch, January 9, 1865

General Robert E. Lee surrenders to Grant, April 9, 1865

Lincoln Assassinated, April 14, 1865

John Wilkes Booth died, April 26, 1865

Hanging of William Cain and George Duniway, May 17, 1865

Completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, May 1869

Marriage of Allen Dear and Fannie Vale,
Douglas County, OR, June 2, 1884

Birth of Thurman "Tim" Eugene Dear Aug 24, 1902

The True Histories of the Names

1. **George P. Beale** is the name of one of the two convicted 1865 real-life murderers represented in the story. Danford is the given name of **Danford Balch**, who was convicted of murdering a young man who had eloped with his daughter. DB was hanged in Portland in 1859. The other convicted real-life murderer represented in the story was **George Baker.** The victim of Beale and Baker was **Daniel Delany, Sr.**

2. **Thomas Smith** was hanged for murder in Oregon in 1866. The story is told in various media outlets. It is particularly gruesome and sad. Involves a gold mining rush in Idaho. He had been conducting an affair with his brother's 16-year-old daughter, while the brother was in Idaho. The brother returns and finds out about the affair. He is beating his daughter, at which time Thomas killed him and brother's wife. Another brother, still in Idaho, killed himself about the same time as the hanging.

2. Waldo is the surname of **Daniel Waldo**, who, in human decency, buried George Baker and George Beale on his own farm when no one else would offer help. **Melinda** is the middle name of **Adeline Weed**, who was a practitioner of hydrotherapy and an

advocate for women being able to take roles as doctors and lawyers. She was the first physician in OR. In 1870, she and her husband moved to Seattle, where he was twice elected mayor.

3. The **Meek** brothers were early guides and trappers in the Oregon Territory. **Caleb** is the given name of another trapper.

4. Nathaniel Balch is, of course, the fictional murdered man in the Eidetic Plane story. His given name is from a person named **Nathaniel Ford**, who promised to free his three slaves when they reached OR, but he did not keep his promise. The people sued Ford in 1854 and won, gaining their freedom.

5. Duniway is a substitute for **Delaney** (Delany), a name appearing as a surname of early pioneers on the website of the Oregon Genealogical Society. **Abigail Jane Scott Duniway** was a pioneering suffragette in the state.

6. Coe, the middle names of the fictional Melinda Waldo and George Duniway, is the surname of a **Nathaniel Coe**. He was a member of the Whig Party and strongly anti-slavery and fought for the equal rights of women. He was considered by many of his peers to be a radical, but was esteemed and well-respected.

In the 1830s, Coe and his wife hosted a gathering for a "female society supporting moral purity"—the American Female Moral Reform Society (FMR)—an early women's rights advocacy group against rape culture and misogyny, billed as "anti-seduction" to protect women. They then formed the Nunda, New York chapter of FMR. At the time, men who raped women were not charged with a crime, and the victims were deemed unfit for marriage and often had no choice but to enter the sex industry as prostitutes. During the 71st session of the New York Assembly, Coe introduced the first-of-its-kind anti-rape bill "An act to punish seduction", which passed into law on March 22, 1848. The Married Women's Property Act was passed into law the following month, and in Seneca, New York, a few months later, women demanded the right to vote for the first time.

Nathanial Coe founded Hood River, OR in the 1850's.

6. **William Cain** was the third of three men hanged in Oregon in 1865 in a different case. Cain was reported as being a blacksmith. I found no other details about this story.

Some of the historical information for this story came from a Wikipedia article on early Oregon settlers and pioneers. I have not researched names beyond what I read there. My idea was to acquire real names from Oregon history, and ones somewhat appropriate to events in the story. In the case of Cain, I wanted to use "George Baker", but there were too many last names beginning with B, which might confuse the reader. Also, as I mentioned, the other real-life convicted murderer's given name was George.

Resources for the Story

Many of the asserted details of this story, including historical and contemporary references, true and spurious, originated from the sources listed below. This is not by any means an exhaustive list.

Oregon Genealogical Society

OregonPioneers.com

DeathPenaltyUSA.org

Harvard's History of Photography Timeline

Lizzie-Bordon.com

Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR 'Uhlenhaut-Coupé', Mercedes-Benz.com

I especially drew from the collection of accounts from "THE HANGING OF UNCLE GEORGE" at OregonPioneers.com.

"Black in Oregon, 1840-1870" National and Oregon Chronology of Events, sos.oregon.gov (the Oregon Secretary of State site)

"Commerce, Climate, and Community, A History of Portland and its People" by William Toll, oregonhistoryproject.org

"Mayors and Postmasters of Salem, Oregon" politicalgraveyard.com

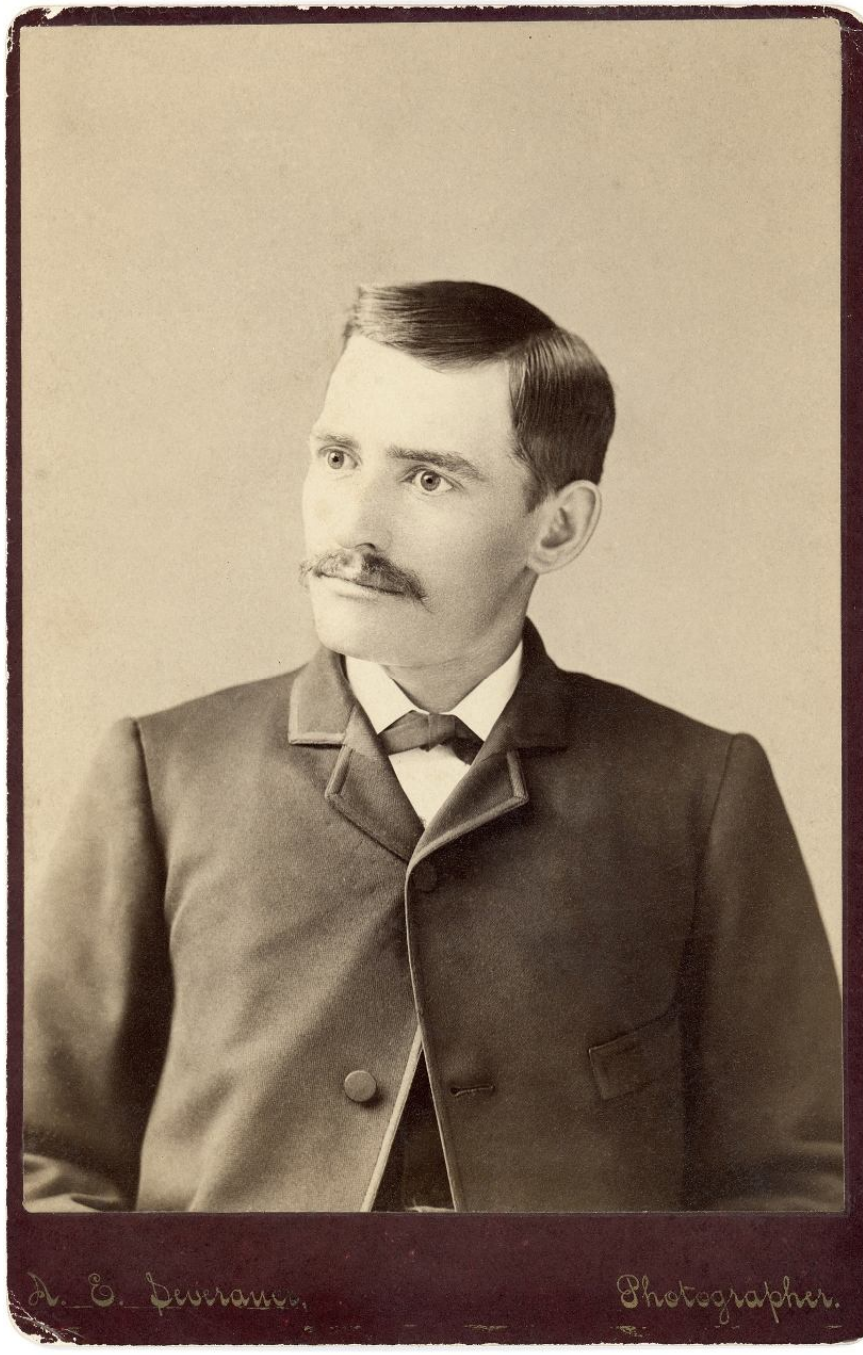
"Can Superyachts Cross the Ocean?" Article of November 24, 2022 Simpsonmarine.com

Boatinternational.com

http://www.condortales.com/ On the Trail, Arrivals in 1851

- ✓ Wally Dunsmoor, a distant cousin on the Dear line.
- ✓ The Ancestors of Meredith Eugene Hunt, compiled by Richard Duane Sears, of Berea College, 2008.

Maxwell
MAIN ST.
WALLA WALLA, WASHINGTON.


A. E. Severance.
Photographer.

Notes on the Story and the Photographs

Ordinarily, I'd prefer to not write a background to the Jonathan Barron stories; I do write notes, but I fear to explain too much and thereby undermine the story's ability to speak for itself. But in this instance, there is so much that's personal, it might help the reader, and more importantly, family members, to understand what built the story.

This story began from my brother's work in digitally preserving family photographs and images of other, more or less two-dimensional family artifacts. As he processed the material, he learned a growing amount of the history that surrounded the people in the photos and of their world, and their connections to already documented histories, many of which tied into early pioneers and settlers in Oregon.

My own interest was less in the broad history, but more in the connections this preservation work helped me to form with relatives whom I had known, even those I had known only from my experience as a young child. Seeing the pictures of my grandfather or my mother as children sometimes, as I say, "ripped my heart out" in evoking emotions of affection and tenderness. I didn't know what to do with these emotions other than feel them. At some point, I thought about conveying

them in a story, and then as often happens, I started thinking imaginatively about extending the feelings we have into actual physical connections, as if the photographs could be a portal you can funnel yourself through and begin walking around and breathing the air.

The story never took my imaginings quite so far. I mean, it's really far-fetched and magical. The Jonathan Barron cases never go so far. They travel just across the border of what we ordinarily think is real. They nudge the possible a little further than what we observe, and in fact, if we aren't paying attention, we might not notice these things at all. Like the aliens who appear to be tourists just might be weird tourists. And the bit of dizziness we feel when the solar system changes direction and speed might only be dizziness. Or, the people who transition into the Long Night World might be experiencing a periodic psychosis.

The Eidetic Plane story moved from feelings of connection to fanciful speculation that the murderer, George Beal, might be a relative (we have Beales back then), and asking, what if Uncle George was innocent?

Anyway, one way or another, there's a lot of stretching in Eidetic Plane.

Yoncalla, Oregon never was and never will be as large as my Yoncalla. The real festival, if an online video I watched is representative, is little more than a band on a stage and a few ladies dancing in the street.

My Grandma Dear grew up there and she married Tim. I always heard the name Yoncalla spoken with a reverence, as if it were where Life on Earth began. I think I only ever heard my grandma and any of her seven siblings pronounce it. In fact, as a child I had the impression that only they could say the name, like it was a special, sacred word that only they possessed. And being one of the descendants of the Original Family, I was among the privileged few who could hear it pronounced. And I might even have the right to use the word in a story. I was there once when I was about a year old, and I have photographs to prove it, too.

In truth, if history can be believed, the hangings depicted in this story took place in Salem. Oregon. And Tim's family lived in Oakland, Oregon. But Yoncalla sounds so much better than Oakland, like the mythical villages of Brigadoon and Shangri-La.

I did learn a few things about the real Yoncalla. My Grandma Dear played basketball in high school there and graduated in 1928. I have her gold class ring. (See page 117.) The town has a skate park and two

cemeteries. One of its residents said that they once were a powerhouse in sports. Forgive me if any of this is inaccurate.

I included a lot of jokes in the story. You probably know who Whelan is. As far as I know, he's not designing an all-electric ocean-going, stainless steel superyacht that cruises 100 miles an hour, but he might now after he reads my story.

Photographs

All the photos in this book, unless noted, are from my Grandmother Dear's collection, found loose in boxes or pasted into photographic albums, but we, my brother and I, are not able to identify all of the people and places in them. Many of the photos have notes on the back, but not all. The photos are placed in this book with a notion of chronological order mixed with aesthetic factors. The notes represent only a part of the information we have, and the family photos and paper artifacts only a tiny fraction of what's in our collection. The flower space markers and butterfly ornaments are designs my Grandmother Dear kept.

Cover. Most likely Tim, and an older brother. The photo has been flipped horizontally to place the boy on the front, and material added for the spine. The original is shown on the **Contents Page**. (A livestock farmer in OR claims these two people are her relatives and not mine. She offers no proof.)

Opposite Title Page. Portraits of Tim. He looks unhappy, as if he just received a whupp'n to convince him to sit still. My brother speculates he is trying too hard to follow the photographer's instructions.

Opposite Copyright Page. Possibly Robert Dear, Tim's grandfather, who was born in North Carolina and raised in Missouri. He drowned in May 1863 during the battle of Big Black River Ridge while fighting with the Confederates in the Civil War. Robert's father, Joshua Dear, was a quartermaster with the Confederates and survived the battle.

Dedication Page. This is a Vail-Dear Family gathering. Vail is Tim's mother's maiden name. He is in the photo, as well as my Grandmother Dear (Blanche Irene Toner), and my mother—the little light-haired girl in the lower left corner. c. 1938.

77 Tim Dear with woolly chaps, c. 1922.

79 CCC Camp, 1934.

81 The Turning Point, 1934-35.

82 Tim and two young ladies, one possibly his sister, c. 1927.

85 Fannie Amanda Vail Dear, c. 1884. Tim's mom and an older sibling.

87 Allen Jenkins Dear, Tim's father.

89 Portrait of Tim, middle age, c. 1958.

91 False teeth and grin, c. 1918.

97 The telegram to Allen J. Dear says, "Have two cars sheep ready to ship Wednesday or Thursday see letter –P.B. Beckly. Portland, OR 17-Oakland OR 07 May 18, 1890."

99 Tim and a cousin, Tim's father Allen, his mother Fannie, and his grandmother in front of the Edward G. Young House. Young, the brother of Tim's maternal grandmother, Amanda Young Vail, who is standing, right. This photograph had been made into a postcard. Notice the tubs of wool on the porch. c. 1910.

101 The south side of the Young house.

103 South Elevation of the Young House. The architectural drawings were made through the Historic American Buildings Project of the National Park Service in 1936. This collection, kept by the Douglas County Historical Museum in Oakland, where the house was located, also includes the front and north elevations and drawings for the mantle piece. The house was built in 1850. (NPS art and photography are Public Domain.)

105 Allen Dear and horse. He passed away in 1919, so the photo is before that date, of course.

107 Dear-Deakins-Vail Family Gathering, including Tim and his mother. We know the names of everyone in this group, including the dog. James Deakins was the stepfather of Tim's father. The Dear, Deakins, and Vail families stayed close.

109 John and Bertha Toner and two of my Grandma Dear's older siblings in 1904. We have many photos of Tim's family, and even more of my Grandma Dear's, but because they didn't factor into this story, I only included one exception. (We also have many photos of my dad's family.)

Below The Oak Park House, 1939. The house first belonged to my grandparents, Tim and Blanche Dear, for many years, and my mom lived with them when pregnant with me while my dad was in Korea. My grandparents sold the house to a neighbor when they moved out to Leadbetter Road at LaCamas Lake. The neighbor rented it to my parents for another of many years. I attended first grade at the school just one block up the street. My teacher, Mrs. English.

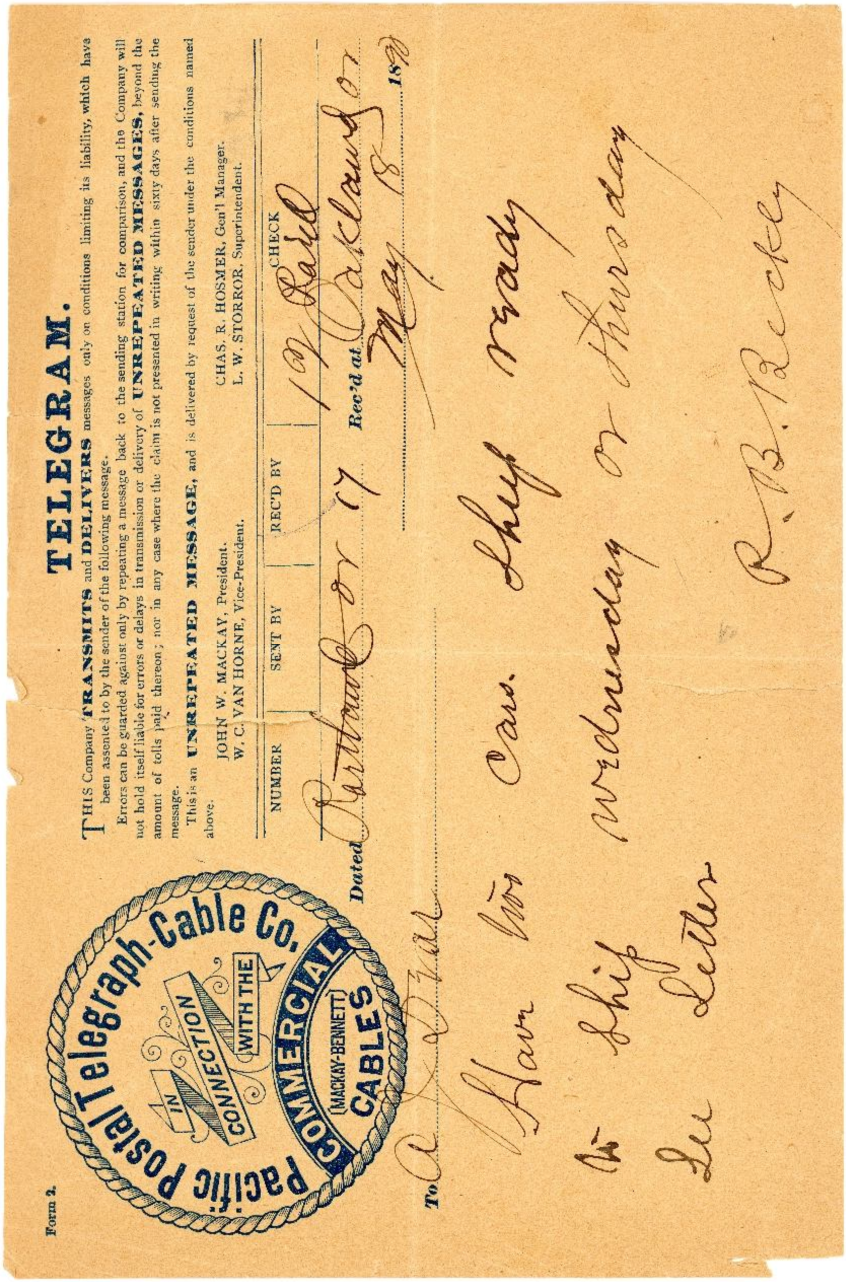
We had the largest front yard on the block, and it was a center for play for all the neighborhood children. The house was situated at the end of a dead-end street, and just beyond the trees that you see on the left is the slough, a place of endless adventure at the confluence of the Washougal and Columbia Rivers. Sometimes the slough was dry and empty, except for fish-filled pools, and sometimes so full our basement was flooded. In 1948 the water rose into the house.

Just beyond the Washougal to the west was the papermill, where our entire family worked at one time or another. My dad would walk home at the end of his night shift and catch a steelhead trout for our dinner. Our day clock was the whistle for shift changes. Multiple whistles in a row meant a fire in the mill, and all firemen were to report.

My mom's sister, Ann, is seated in the high chair.

I could write a book about our life in this house.

For hundreds more photographs, and more history of our family,
go to https://archive.org/details/@dearhuntarchive



Form 2.

Pacific Postal Telegraph-Cable Co.
IN CONNECTION WITH THE COMMERCIAL (MACKAY-BENNETT) CABLES

TELEGRAM.

THIS Company **TRANSMITS** and **DELIVERS** messages only on conditions limiting its liability, which have been assented to by the sender of the following message.

Errors can be guarded against only by repeating a message back to the sending station for comparison, and the Company will not hold itself liable for errors or delays in transmission or delivery of **UNREPEATED MESSAGES**, beyond the amount of tolls paid thereon; nor in any case where the claim is not presented in writing within sixty days after sending the message.

This is an **UNREPEATED MESSAGE**, and is delivered by request of the sender under the conditions named above.

JOHN W. MACKAY, President.
W. C. VAN HORNE, Vice-President.

CHAS. R. HOSMER, Gen'l Manager.
L. W. STORROR, Superintendent.

NUMBER	SENT BY	REC'D BY	CHECK
			10 Paid

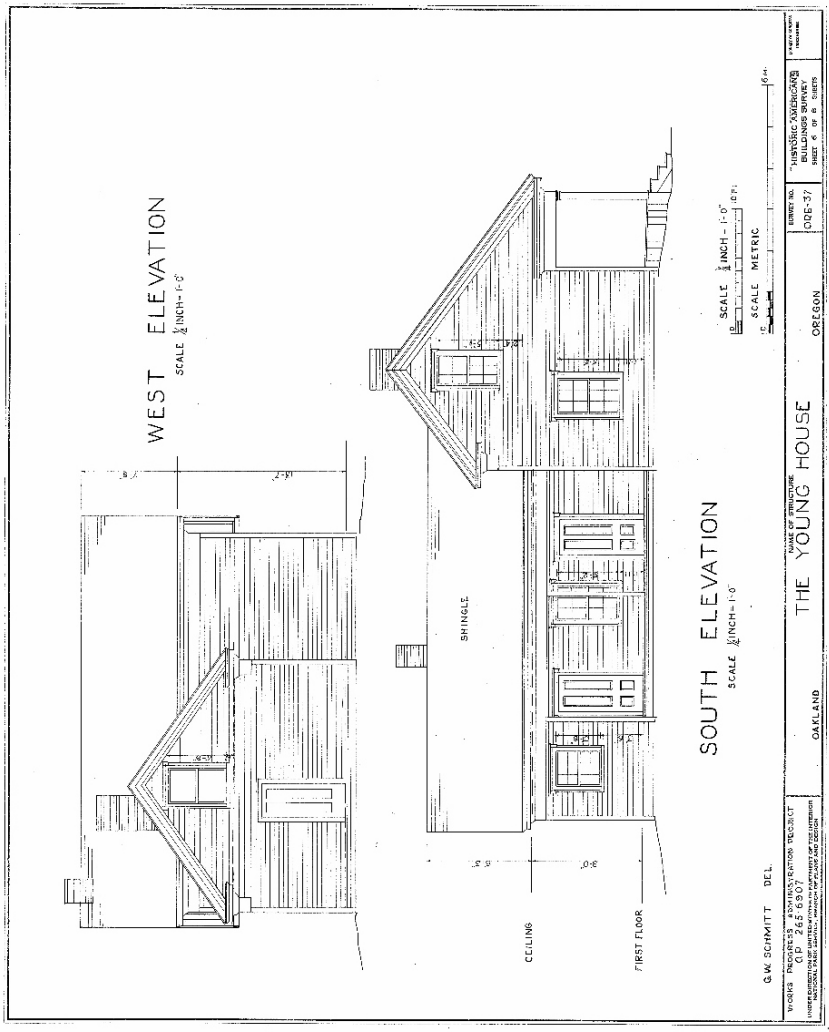
Dated Portland Or 17 **Rec'd at** Oakland Or May 18 189[illegible]

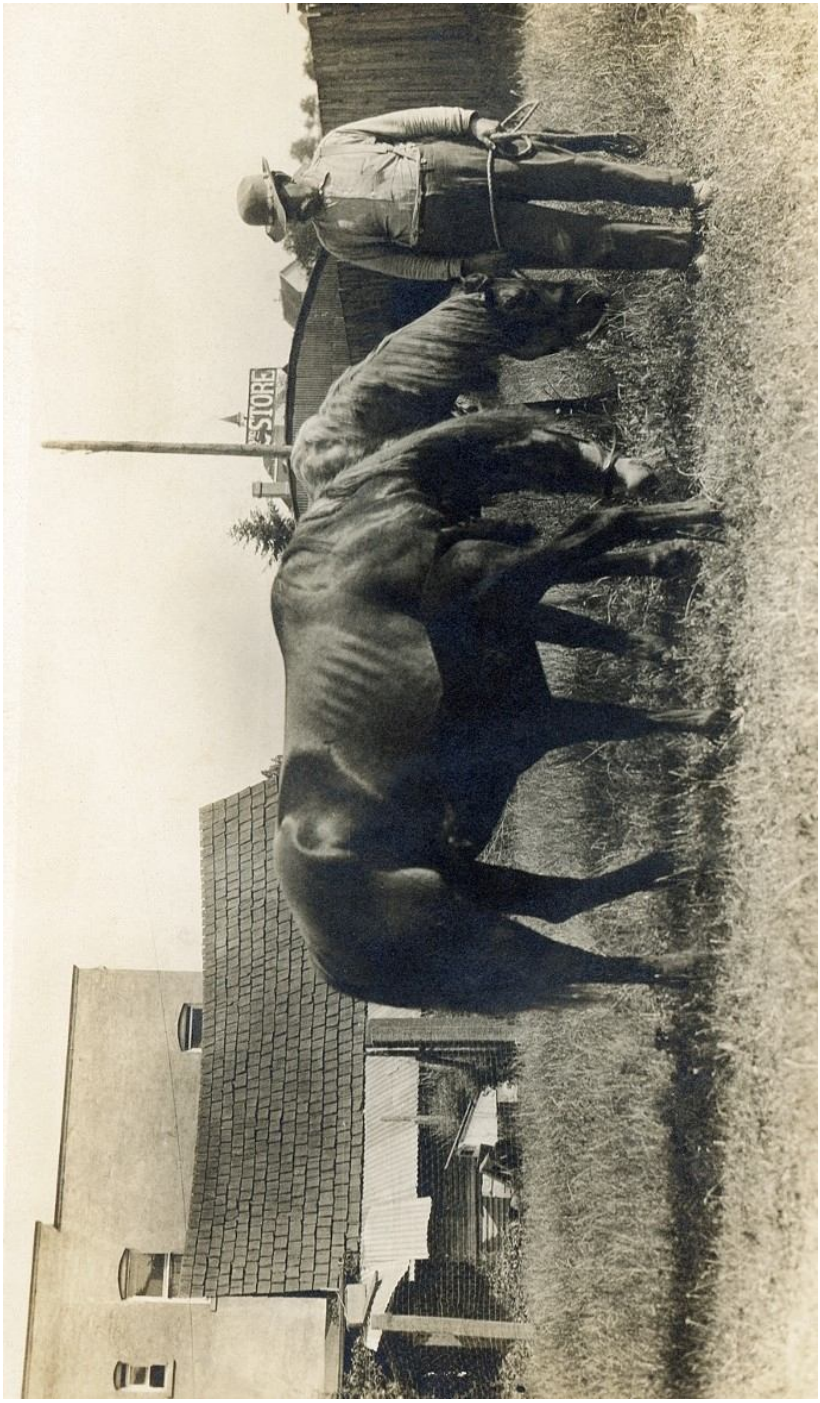
To A. [illegible]

Have two Cars. Ship ready
to ship wednesday or thursday
See Letter

R. B. Beckley

39-0-37


WEST ELEVATION
SCALE ½INCH = 1'-0"
SOUTH ELEVATION
SCALE ½INCH = 1'-0"
SHINGLE
CEILING
FIRST FLOOR
SCALE ½INCH = 1'-0"
SCALE METRIC
NAME OF STRUCTURE
THE YOUNG HOUSE
OAKLAND
OREGON
SURVEY NO.
ODE-37
"HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY"
SHEET 6 OF 8 SHEETS
G.W. SCHMITT DEL.


STORE

Hazel Madding's Ordinary Magic:
A Faerie Tale

Chalumeau, an American jazz musician, meets a lovely and wealthy English country girl in London in midwinter…

The story is told by Chalumeau's nephew, Atlas.

It is an unusually warm evening in February, and he is playing his trombone on the sidewalk outside the London club where he is to perform with his band later that night.

A certain family is visiting the city to see the sights. They are enamored by his music and strike up a conversation, during which they promise to return for the performance. After the show, they invite him and the band to visit their home, a spreading estate in the southwest of England. The other band members must return to the U.S. for their winter break from touring, but Chalumeau is free and agrees to come for a few days.

The heart of the Madding Estate is Walmsley Manor, located between the hamlets of Crewkerne and Kidwick in the ceremonial county of Wiltshire.

Stonehenge is in the southern part of this county.

The Madding family has two beautiful daughters who are two years apart in age; the younger one, Fawn, intellectual, refined, and articulate. The older one, Hazel, is nearly the opposite, being romantic, down-to-earth, and emotive. The younger one excels at chess, and beats Chalumeau during the evenings around the fireplace without trying, but politely as well, teaching him as they play. "I don't think you can beat my nephew, Atlas," Chalumeau said to her. "He's uncanny. I think he can read my mind."

The older sister loves to play parlor magic tricks, and always has a new one to show Chalumeau and the family. Her favorite trick is making things disappear. During these cozy winter evenings, Chalumeau also performs on one or other of his instruments, including on the family's baby grand piano with Fawn, and on his trombone, while Hazel improvises on her

clarinet. They are talented sisters. With the family's blessing, he decides to stay for the remainder of his winter break, which lasts another three weeks.

During the morning, the girls engage in lessons with their private tutors, and in the afternoon, Fawn leads tours of the house while Hazel works around the estate with the farm activities and animal care. Chalumeau practices and takes care of band business with their insomniac manager in the morning (it is late night in the U.S.) and works with one or the other of the daughters every afternoon. On Sundays the family attends an ancient church in the Crewkerne Hamlet and there he successfully plays the hymns on the pipe organ, as the parish only has an organist once a month. It is evident to everyone around them that both daughters like the visitor and are working to charm him in their own best ways. It is, however, the older who wins his heart with her gushing about the beauties she finds in music, art, and in the natural world, a world Chalumeau does not yet fully appreciate, him being a creature of the city and urban nightlife, and not having much time to explore the estate with Hazel on one of her frequent rambles.

Despite their wide differences in culture, Hazel's parents agree to allow Chalumeau and Hazel to marry, and after her father performs a thorough background check of the young man, he gives okay to them marrying before Chalumeau begins his spring tour. The girl has only travelled once to Europe for a summer, and she spent most of it on the island of Crete with relatives, so she is excited to be seeing the world on her honeymoon.

The young nephew, Atlas, pauses everything in his busy young life and flies over for the wedding.

The ritual is conducted at the ancient church, and the couple spends the night at one of the estate cottages that are usually rented out to guests. The next day they sleep in and relax at the cottage and join the family for the evening meal with leftovers. Atlas returns to his busy life.

The second day after the wedding and Hazel's last day on the estate before they must leave, she invites Chalumeau to go horseback riding with her to say farewell to the place she loves. He, while he doesn't say so, is willing to go, but is unfamiliar with and even afraid of horses. No one else is available to go riding

with her, and it's a rainy, dreary day for a plain mortal, so she goes out alone. "I'll only be gone an hour," she says.

The horse returns, but she does not. Everyone assumes at first, she's playing a disappearing trick, but it doesn't take long to realize she's missing. Some speculate she might have run away because she doesn't want to leave home, but that makes no sense. They search to no avail. They find nothing. The police search the area, put out flyers, and inquire countrywide and internationally.

Nothing.

The new husband excuses himself from joining the jazz tour and goes on long wandering treks across the fields and fens, hoping to find her. He only finds an unremarkable ancient bench on a remote part of the estate. A creek, shrubs, a fence row, tall trees. The ruins of Unsor Castle across the way. While sitting on the bench he smells this exquisite, fleeting scent, he hears the call of a bird with a song of Heaven, he feels a soft breeze and sunlight on his face. He rises to look around and finds a shrub loaded with berries. Then he returns to the manor.

It's time to leave. He has engagements back in America. In time, he engenders an idea that his wife's body is somewhere near the bench. Law enforcement and dogs find nothing.

His life continues, and it seems his wife has vanished forever, but every midwinter he returns to the Madding Estate and the stone bench to see, smell, hear, feel, and taste those magical things again, convinced his wife is communicating her love with him in these ways. A vision of her in the sunlight and clouds, the perfume of her hair, a gentle stroke of her hand across his cheek, the taste of her lips on his, a song sung in her voice.

After many years of a full, crowded, but emotionally solitary life , he dies. At the funeral his nephew, Atlas, hears of Chalumeau's belief in Hazel's magic. Atlas is a psychic who often works with law enforcement to solve brutal crimes, and he sometimes assists paranormal investigator Jonathan Barron on his cases. Atlas asks Barron to join him in looking into the matter. Barron in turn, invites a well-known local naturalist. They go to the stone bench in midwinter. Atlas senses nothing supernatural. The naturalist finds and identifies everything, including a rare bird and a rare witch hazel tree, ones never found in this part of the world. The shrubs with winter berries are unknown to science.

Everyone concludes that through those natural things, the husband only took comfort in his imaginings, as real and powerful as his sensory experiences were.

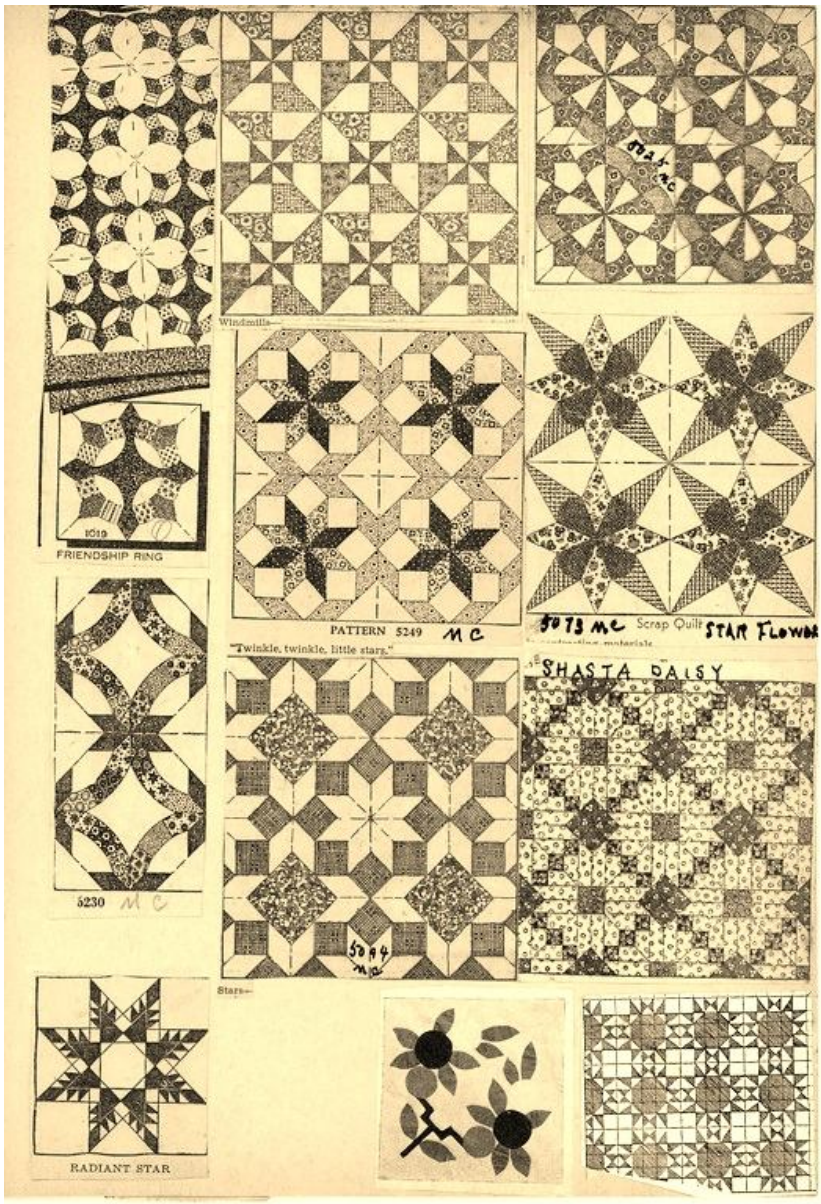
They all decide not to do a live radio broadcast about this story, as is Barron's practice with many of his cases, because it is so personal to all of them.

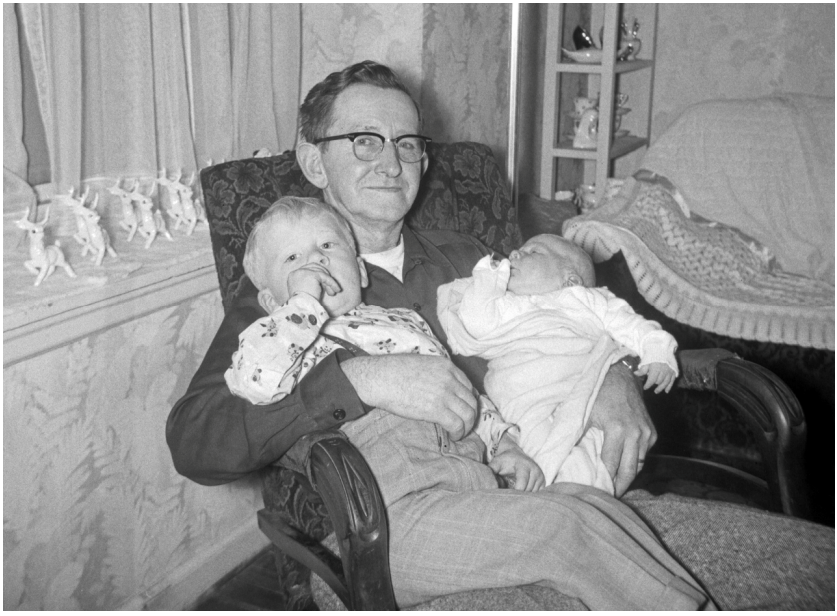
Epilogue

When Fawn, Hazel's sister, who has for many years lived alternately in Crete and the U.S., where she married an American archeologist and raised several children, hears about all of this, she remembers something from her distant childhood and returns to her English country home to look for and find some girlish letters she and Hazel wrote back and forth to each other, though they shared a room together and saw each other every day.

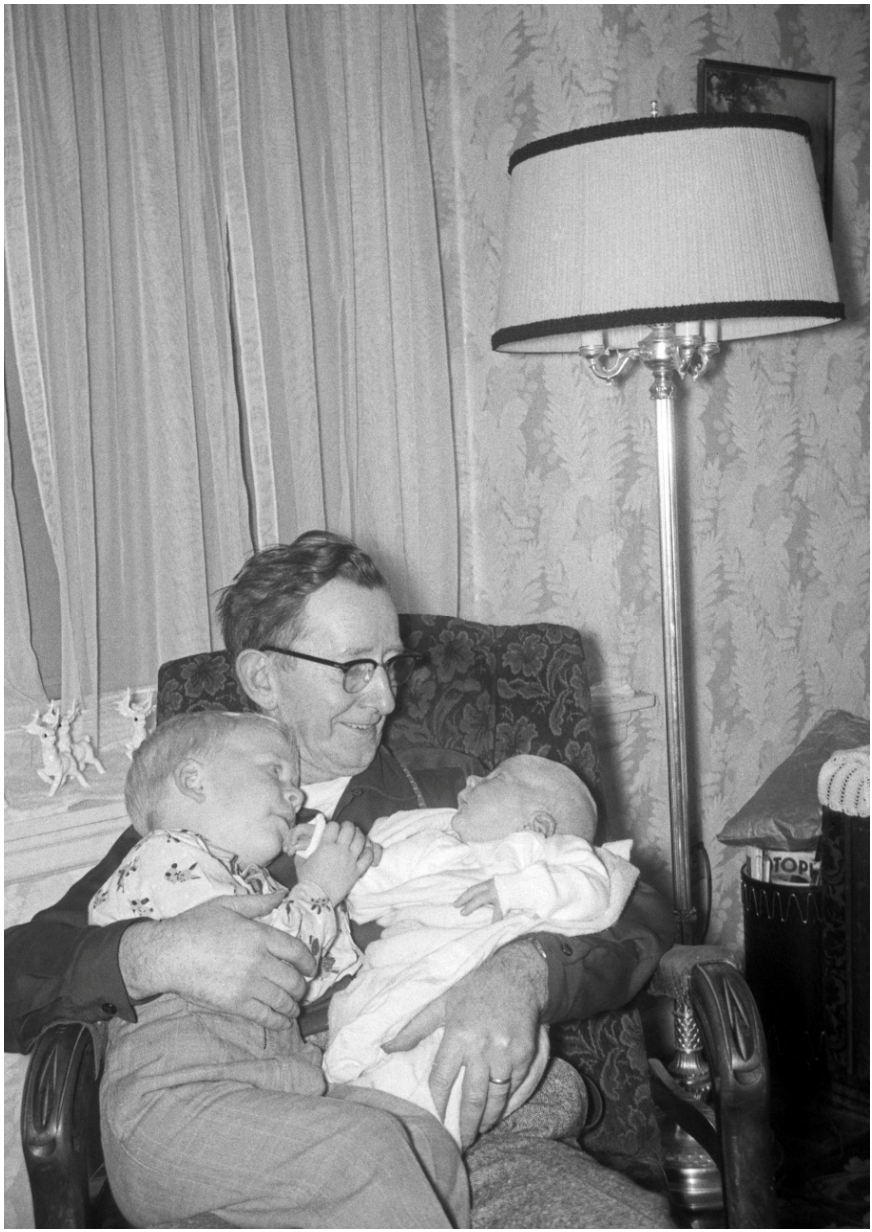
Hazel wrote that the place on the creek with the bench with the scent and the birdsong, and the winter berries, and the ruined castle across the way was her special place that she hoped she could share with her true love someday in her imagined future.

"Jelena" Witch Hazel (Hamamelis x intermedia) Photo by MH


Windmills—
1019
FRIENDSHIP RING
PATTERN 5249 MC
"Twinkle, twinkle, little stars."
5230 MC
5044 MC
Stars—
SHASTA DAISY
RADIANT STAR

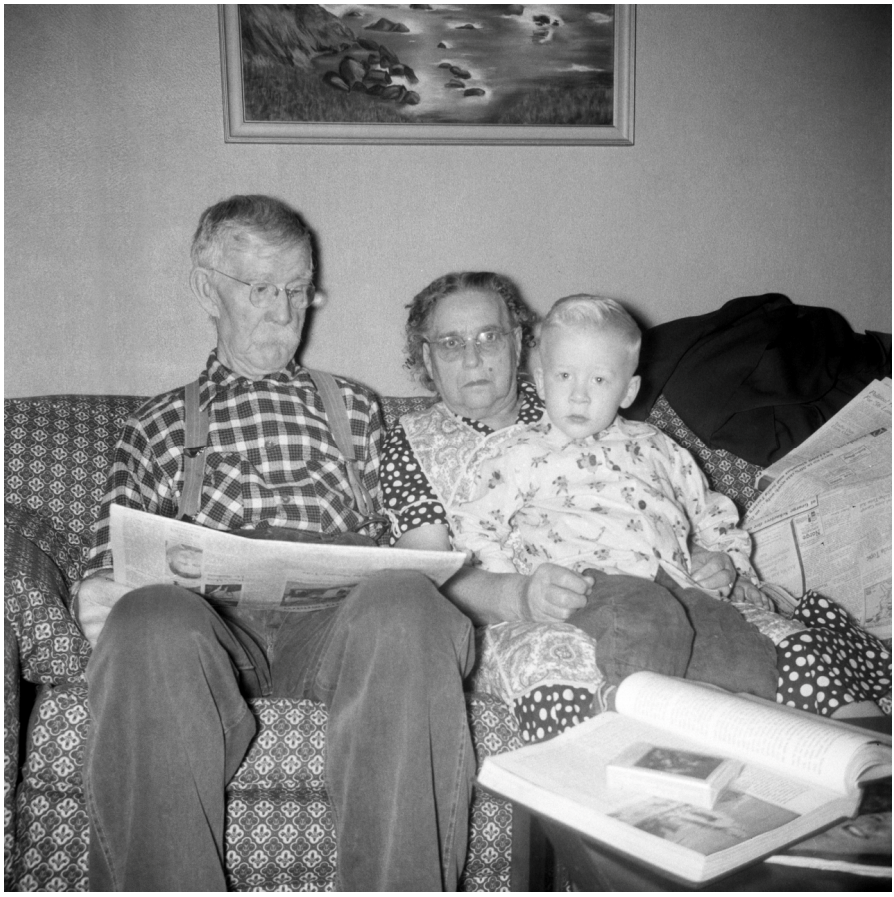


MHS



The author, his baby brother—the family archivist and historian—and Tim. c. December 1955. Oak Park of Camas, WA

Next Page: the author in Yoncalla with John and Bertha Toner, his great-grandparents



The Jonathan Barron Stories
In the Order of their Composition

When Earth Whispers JTB 1
An earthquake in Lynchville, CA releases an unthinkable nightmare.

Turtle of the World JTB 2
Monsters are eating the garbage at the Swan Mountain Retreat Center.

Odd Fellows JTB 3
Grandma Middleton always guesses right. Two of her special grandchildren attempt to bust a horrible crime enterprise coming from the highest levels of South Carolina government.

The Greenlandic Windows JTB 4
JTB with his new wife investigate a stone building on the east coast of Greenland that appears to predate humans.

The Long Night Awaits JTB 5
A sleep therapist has a patient who claims each of his nights lasts a year.

The Acme of Egg Evolution JTB 6
Rockcastle County North Carolina conducts a foreclosure auction on property of over 2000 pristine pastoral and wooded acres owned, farmed, and lived on by a single family and their friends since 1790. Color.

Through the Eidetic Plane JTB 7
An Oregon town holds a spring festival every year that commemorates the 1865 hangings of two convicted folk-hero murderers.

Hazel Madding's Ordinary Magic JTB 8
A young English woman disappears while horseback riding alone on her family estate on the day after her wedding.

Tim, grinning behind his veil, with a honeybee swarm in a lilac limb at his and Grandma Dear's three acre "ranch" in Camas, Washington. Sixteen huge houses now occupy their homey, horticultural paradise on Leadbetter Road near La Camas Lake.

Books by Mickey Hunt

When Earth Whispers & Other Mostly Speculative Tales (2016)

Clouds Fall to Earth
Black & White, Color, and Hardcover Editions
Novel (2025)

The Lone Journey Together:
Imaginative Stories of Beauty and Warm Humor
Fiction (2025)

Strange Days Radio (2025)*

The Acme of Egg Evolution (2025)*

Through the Eidetic Plane (2026)*

***Selected Cases of Paranormal Investigator Jonathan Barron**

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